Aikido as Spiritual Practice in the United States

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The practice of martial arts in the United States has become widespread. As a practitioner of Japanese martial arts, I was intrigued by the connections between the martial arts and Asian philosophy and religions, and how Americans viewed their practice. This connection was particularly apparent in the case of Aikido, a Japanese martial art founded in the first half of the twentieth century.

The initial research examined the writings of Aikido's founder, Ueshiba Morihei, his personal students, and the writings of American Aikido practitioners. After developing a background for Aikido as a form of spiritual practice from these writings, detailed interviews were conducted with 33 Americans who practice Aikido in the Midwest at a number of different dojos (martial arts practice halls) representing different styles of Aikido.

The results of these interviews showed that for approximately two-thirds of the subjects, Aikido was a spiritual practice. Of these, roughly half saw their Aikido practice as a supplement to traditional Western religious practice. The other half, however, had rejected or given up traditional Western religious practices and had made Aikido a part of their personal religious beliefs and practices, without aligning themselves with any particular religious institution.

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Chapter I

Introduction

Aikido as a Topic of Interest

In their home country, the Japanese martial arts have been seen as a form of spiritual practice for more than 400 years. Many of the oldest arts have direct links to a particular kami, Buddhist temple, or Shinto shrine (Friday 1997, 19-24; Shimizu 1976, 10; Mitani 1982, 10). They have often been considered a form of shugyo or ascetic training similar to the shugyo described by Carmen Blacker in The Catalpa Bow (1975).

One of the earliest instances of the martial arts being treated as means for spiritual/religious development is in the writings of Takuan Soho (1573-1645). References to the martial arts as a means of spiritual development can also be found in the widely read Go Rin Sho or Book of Five Rings, by Miyamoto Musashi, written at approximately the same time that Takuan was writing. An emphasis on the spiritual development of the practitioner can be found in modern martial arts such as karate and Judo which are practiced around the world, and which have even been included in the Olympics in various forms.

This thesis will address the practice of one particular martial art, Aikido, in the United States. Aikido is one of the most overtly spiritual of the martial arts, emphasizing that its teachings are not just a set of techniques for dealing with violent attacks, but, more importantly, they are for improving oneself and drawing closer to the divine. Within Japan, there is nothing unusual about something as mundane as practicing self-defense techniques also being seen as a means of spiritual development, but in the United States, this is a radical idea. Japanese

martial arts have been practiced in the United States now for nearly a hundred years, but they did not become widely popular until the occupation of Japan after World War II. After the Allied ban on the practice of martial arts was lifted in 1948, American soldiers stationed in Japan were heavily exposed to Judo and karate, and these two arts were soon being popularized in the United States by returning GIs who had studied them in Japan. Since the early Edo period, Japanese martial arts have stressed the spiritual development of the practitioner, rather than simply teaching fighting skills, and I believe this spiritual emphasis has been retained to a greater or lesser degree in the United States.1

Since the 1960s the martial arts have begun to be popularly recognized as means of spiritual development as well as a way to learn fighting skills. This trend was highlighted by the 1970s television show Kung Fu, starring David Carradine, in which he played an itinerant Shaolin monk in the American Old West.

Tai Chi Chu'an, a Chinese style noted for the very slow, almost dance-like way in which its forms are practiced, is probably the martial art most widely known for its spiritual emphasis, an emphasis which has begun to draw the attention of scholars (DeMarco, 1997). However, there is very little differentiation between martial arts by most people in the United States, and karate seems to form the baseline for people's conceptions of the martial arts, although this is changing.

Since the Kung Fu television show, martial arts movies have moved from being cheaply produced in Hong Kong and having a very limited audience in the United States to being some of Hollywood's biggest consistent money winners. Chuck Norris, Jean Claude VanDamme and Jason Lee have become major action stars. In the late 1980s these karate and wu shu stylists were joined in the box office by Steven Seagal, a high ranking Aikido practitioner. His movies are now some of the most popular action films in America. This has probably done more than everything else combined to increase awareness of Aikido in the United States. However, as might be expected, action movies, Seagal's included, tend to spend far more time on fight sequences than they do on the spiritual lessons of the martial arts.

These movies seem to mirror people's initial reasons for becoming involved in the martial arts. Most people who start the martial arts do so in order to learn how to fight, although this is usually expressed as wanting to learn "self-defense." The spiritual side of the martial arts is most often discovered only after a person has begun practicing a martial art.

Personal Background

My interest in the religious aspects of martial arts in the United States is an outgrowth of my long involvement in the Japanese martial arts both as a practitioner and instructor. My experience with the martial arts began when I was an undergraduate and took a Judo class to fulfill a required P.E. credit. From there

I became involved in the university Judo club. I continued my involvement in Judo after graduation with a job in Japan, which allowed me to train in Judo as much as seven days a week. While in Japan I also became involved in the Japanese martial arts of Muso Jikiden Eishin Ryu iaido and Shinto Muso Ryu jodo, which teach the use of the Japanese sword, and the short staff, respectively. Besides these, I also have some experience in the Chinese internal martial art Tai Chi Chu'an. I have been practicing Judo for twelve years, and iaido and jodo for five years, with occasional cross training in Aikido. All of this experience has led me to investigate whether American practitioners treat the martial arts as religious practice.

Aikido and Americans

In my experience, Americans begin their martial arts training for any number of reasons. Some wish to learn to defend themselves (a sometimes ridiculous notion, because most experienced martial artists never actually use their skills in "real" life). Some come to get in shape, and for them the martial arts are exotic forms of exercise. Some are looking for an active form of the things they have read in the Tao Te Ching or something similar. Some people in the West begin their training in their search for enlightenment. Since D. T. Suzuki spread the idea of the martial arts as a path to enlightenment in Zen and Japanese Culture (1959), the martial arts have been perceived as a form of moving Zen by many. Over time, a martial artist's reasons for practicing often change. Although an individual's initial reasons for starting may remain, they often become overshadowed by other motivations, which develop as they continue to practice. People who start for exercise often come to value the sense of security that they gain from being proficient at fighting, and people who started to learn how to fight often find that they continue because they like the exercise and the camaraderie of the dojo. Others come to appreciate the philosophical or spiritual aspects with which the martial art is clothed, and a few come to the martial art specifically seeking that aspect.

Of all the Japanese martial arts, Aikido is far and away the art most clearly and overtly focused upon the higher levels of development. Again and again in the literature you read that the spirit of Aikido is taught through the techniques of Aikido, that within the techniques of Aikido is a philosophy of true love and protection for the whole world. This is often difficult to connect with the practice and techniques of Aikido because Aikido's techniques are effective fighting techniques which involve the extremely painful manipulation of joints, and throwing your partner around quite forcefully, as well as occasionally just hitting people outright. Underlying the techniques of Aikido, however, is a basic philosophical value of harmonizing, which is present in all of its techniques. Aikido teaches that all things are connected, and that by working in harmony with the energy of the universe and all things within it, one can accomplish whatever needs to be done without conflict. On the other hand, working in opposition to the harmonious movement of the universe is seen as both much more difficult,

and something which will eventually bring disaster. While Aikido's lessons are couched in the language and techniques of physical confrontation, they are intended to be applied to all aspects of a student's life. The lessons of Aikido are seen as teaching students to recognize the harmonious nature of the Universe, and how to blend with and live in harmony with the universe.

Despite the unfamiliarity of the basic concepts underlying the Aikido worldview and the general strangeness to Americans of the idea of athletics as spiritual practice, Aikido as religious practice nevertheless does seem to be making some headway in the United States. I believe that for many Aikido practitioners, Aikido serves as a portion of their active religious practice. The goal of this thesis, therefore, is to demonstrate this fact with concrete evidence. To this end, I conducted detailed interviews with individual American practitioners of Aikido.

I wish to look at one other question: How exactly do Americans deal with and internalize a non-Western conceptual system like Aikido? Many of the ideas of Aikido represent a radical departure from the Judeo-Christian tradition that predominates in North America. How people absorb these very different ways of looking at and thinking about the world is serious question. Do they simply jettison the Judeo-Christian tradition and replace it completely with a new tradition? Or, instead of forcing themselves to choose between the two, do they find a way to blend these traditions, perhaps by picking and choosing those portions of each that they find suitable? Do they simply subsume one tradition within the other, or do they find some other answer to this problem?

Related Research

Surprisingly little academic research has been conducted in the West on martial arts spirituality. In terms of Aikido, only three scholars have written on the subject. John J. Donohue has written two books and numerous articles about martial arts practice in the United States. His work favors his background as an anthropologist and tends to downplay the spiritual aspect of martial arts practices, treating them largely from sociological and psychological perspectives. Even his 1991 book, The Forge of the Spirit, despite the name, almost totally ignores the role of the spiritual in martial arts. His books, while treating Aikido as one martial art among many, deal with the functional and social role Aikido and other martial arts play in the lives of practitioners.

More germane to this paper is Yuji Ueno's Eastern Philosophy and the Rise of the Aikido Movement (1995). Ueno's research consists of approximately 50 interviews conducted in Canada and Japan. These interviews provide some excellent data. Unfortunately, his approach to data on religion is almost entirely psychological, without much analysis of what sort of religious system Aikido might be. One flaw unfortunately mars his analysis. He tries to compare attitudes about ki in Japanese and Canadian dojos, but does so by comparing a Japanese Ki Society dojo and a Canadian Yoshinkai dojo. These two styles of Aikido have radically

different interpretations of what ki is. The Ki Society focuses almost entirely upon ki, while the Yoshinkai ignores it completely. This renders his comparative study of the attitudes about ki in Japan and Canada worthless. To be useful, he would have to study Japanese and American practitioners of the same styles of Aikido, rather than ones with opposing views on the point he wishes to analyze.

The other scholarly analysis of Aikido is by Crawford (1992). His article, "The Martial Yen: American Participation in the Aikido Tradition" is the most interesting of the scholarly works on Aikido. He lists several things that might make practicing Aikido attractive for Americans, including exercise and various mental benefits and he points out that there are many less dangerous ways a getting these same benefits. The major flaw in his research is that it is entirely anecdotal. His analysis of Aikido as religion is weakened by the fact that his definition of religion doesn't actually tell what a religion is. He quotes Edwin Friedman's "Generation to Generation" and says that there are

> four connections between the preacher and his congregation. These are (in brief): 1 the "multigenerational forces" behind the religious tradition, 2 involvement of the congregational leader during rites of passage, 3 the length of time over which a specific spiritual leader becomes familiar with his congregation (often spanning several generations himself), and 4 the frequent occurrence of individual congregational leaders demonstrating leadership in areas other than spiritual. (Crawford 1992, 33)

Unfortunately, without definitions of churches, spiritual leaders and spiritual areas, this description could be applied to the Boy Scouts and the UAW. Crawford also totally ignores anything that could be described as gods, spirits or other super-human agents.

Outline of Study

In this study I seek to determine if Aikido is a spiritual/religious practice in the United States. To avoid the above problem of determining what constitutes religious practice, Spiro's definition of religion will be used to determine whether or not activities are religious (Spiro 1966, 96). This should avoid many of the problems found in functional definitions of religion, which are often so broad as to be meaningless. It will still allow functions of Aikido to be looked at, but it is clear enough that religious functions can easily be separated from non-religious functions. In order to fully understand Aikido as a spiritual practice, Chapter II will examine some of Aikido's history. The life and development of Aikido's founder, Ueshiba Morihei, will be looked at particularly closely. Aikido's history in

the United States will also be examined.

In Chapter III, the spiritual writings of Aikido will be looked at. These include the teaching poems of Ueshiba, as well as the writings of many of his students, and a brief look at a collection of interviews with American practitioners of Aikido. Chapter IV will present data collected from individual interviews with American Aikido practitioners. This data will show why Americans are practicing Aikido, and what Aikido practice means to them.

Chapter II

History of Ueshiba and Aikido

A Brief History of Budo

In the Heian period (784-1185 C.E.) the primary skills of the warrior in Japan were horseback riding and archery, but as foot soldiers became more prevalent, the use of the sword, naginata (halberd), spear, and unarmed fighting techniques came to predominate, with the sword holding a place above all others. Within the popular literature and urban mythology of the Japanese martial arts, all aspects of spirituality and religion in the modern martial arts are attributed to the influence Zen Buddhism. This represents a tremendous over-emphasis on only one of the traditions involved in the development of the Japanese martial arts or budo. During the Muromachi era (1333-1568), Zen meditation became popular with many of the regional warlords in Japan as means of preparing their soldiers minds for battle. It is a mistake, however, to assume that the benefits sought from this meditation included achieving satori. The monks that teach meditation consider the improved concentration, mental balance, and the ability to maintain a calm mind under the most trying of circumstances to be side effects of the practices used to approach satori. For the samurai warriors who studied Zen from the Muromachi period on, these were often the primary goals.

However, other Japanese religious ideas were influential in the development of budo as well. One of the most important of these was the Shinto idea that enduring physical hardship purifies the spirit. This idea contributed greatly to the way in which budo have been, and are, practiced. Many of the seemingly ridiculous and/or self-destructive practices of the martial arts are really expressions of this belief. Shugendo monks and other groups have long had the practice of meditating and chanting sutras under waterfalls in the dead of winter as a means of purifying themselves, drawing closer to the kami, and developing super-human powers of knowing and healing (Blacker 1975). A story common to the origin of many of the classical martial arts in Japan is that the secrets of the art were revealed to the founder by a kami after an extended period of immersion in ascetic practice. The ideas about purification in Shugendo and the Japanese

martial arts come from Shinto, the indigenous religious tradition of Japan. In Shinto, the kami, or gods and spirits, are pure, and humans are impure. By purifying oneself, one can draw nearer to the kami.

The first verifiable martial arts in Japan, those connected with the Katori and Kashima Shrines,2 were founded sometime in the 15th century, though precisely when is not known. Amazingly, these arts are still extant. However, it was with the introduction of firearms in the 16th century, and the enforced peace of the Tokugawa era beginning in the 17th century, that martial arts started to become vehicles for spiritual practice and development as much as a means of achieving victory in armed conflict.

The writings of three men from the beginning of the 17th century have provided the philosophical and spiritual foundations of Japanese martial arts for nearly four hundred years. The Go Rin Sho or Book of Five Rings by Miyamoto Musashi is the most widely known both in Japan and the west. The Heiho Kaden Sho or, Family War Secrets Book by Yagyu Munenori is also fundamental in the history of Japanese martial arts, partly because its author was head of what was at that time the most influential school of martial arts in Japan, Shin Kage Yagyu Ryu, and the official instructor for three generations of Shoguns. Here also is the first strong connection between the martial arts and Zen, with Yagyu strongly recommending the practice of zazen as a means of developing one's mind (Miyamoto 1993, 105).

The third leg of the philosophical stool of the martial arts is provided not by a martial artist, but by Takuan Soho, a Zen priest, Sado (Tea Ceremony) Master and correspondent with Yagyu Munenori. His writings, especially the Fudo Myo Ryoku Chi, or Immovable Wisdom, have been a great source for martial artists, and have been translated into English as The Unfettered Mind (1986). The three letters translated in The Unfettered Mind contain a great deal that is simply mystifying for most people, both Japanese and Westerner alike, yet they remain a tremendous source of inspiration. I have seen calligraphy of fudo myo ryoku chi (immovable wisdom) in numerous dojos in the United States and Japan.

Over the 250 plus years of the Tokugawa Shogunate in Japan, the martial arts moved farther and farther from their roots as battlefield arts. The arts of the sword were technically denied to those not of the samurai class. However, as the Shogunate continued, the stipends of the samurai continued to be paid in rice while the economy expanded and converted to a monetary base. Under these new conditions, wealthy merchants and farmers found that they could purchase that which was technically forbidden them. The non-sword arts grew in practice as well, and these were much more useful for a populace that was barred from carrying swords. The arts of the staff, truncheon, and jujutsu (unarmed combat techniques) came to be practiced by a more and more diverse group.

As the possibility of war diminished, and the memories of the battlefield faded and died with the generations, the techniques and the way they were practiced

changed also. Many arts, including the arts of the sword, came to be practiced exclusively indoors, on smooth, hardwood floors. This inevitably led to changes within the arts, and with how they were practiced. Many of the martial arts lost elements such as footwork which were essential for use outdoors on uneven terrain, and developed traits such as sliding footsteps which are useful only on smooth, polished floors. Accompanying these changes in the techniques was a shift in what was primarily sought in the martial arts, as many practitioners began to prize mental and spiritual development rather than combat skills. It is undeniable that much of what is taught remains effective in a fight, however, or modern police and militaries would not continue to practice them.

These changes were neither instantaneous nor universal. Many schools retained their combat orientation and sneered at those that sought to develop the total person. This shift in focus to the spiritual rather than the practical, however, was present in many areas of Japanese culture, with spiritual ways developing in many disciplines, including sado (tea ceremony), kado (flower arranging), and shodo (calligraphy), among others. The martial arts were just one thread of a larger tapestry. These changes in the arts of the warrior were, and are, but a minor thread in the tapestry of Japanese social and religious life.

The goal of the martial arts is to train the body and the kokoro.3 The physical training is the aspect which most people are generally aware of. It is easy to see the physical aspects of the martial arts, as they are celebrated in the movies and on television. These, however, are merely outer skills, and it is the goal of martial artist to not need them. Being able to defeat an enemy through skill is the lowest level of the martial arts, one that is idealized by the mass media, and looked down upon by masters of the martial arts. The next level is to be so advanced that you can defeat your opponent without using your skills. There is a classic story about Bokuden, the founder of Kage-ryu (school) of martial arts. (Draeger 1973b, 71-72). Bokuden was on a ferry, and one of the other passengers was a rough warrior who was bragging about his skills and intimidating the other passengers. Finally, he asked Bokuden what style he practiced. Bokuden said, "The style of 'Winning-without-using-my-hands.'" The warrior was insulted and demanded that Bokuden show this. Bokuden agreed, but recommended that they take a small boat that was attached to the ferry and go to a nearby island, so they wouldn't hurt anyone else. The warrior agreed and they set out for the island. When they got close to shore, the warrior leaped out of the boat and waded ashore. Bokuden gathered himself up as if he was going to get out of the boat, but instead he grabbed an oar and pushed the boat back out into the sea. He called back, "This is called winning without using your hands." This is the second level of mastery in the martial arts. It is the level at which one doesn't need his skills, because he can transform the situation so that there is no conflict.

The highest level of mastery is described by Takuan. At this level, your physical skills are not needed, because no one could even conceive of attacking you.

He who uses the sword, but not to kill others means that even though he does not use the sword to cut others down, when others are confronted by this principle, they cower down and become as dead men of their own accord. There is no need to kill them. (Soho 1986, 81)

The first level is the level of physical skill. It is easily seen, and is what most often initially attracts people to the martial arts. The second level is reached by very few of those who begin practicing the martial arts, and the third level exists mainly as a legend and unreachable goal for martial artists.

The level of physical skill, and more precisely the practices that are required to achieve any degree of proficiency in the martial arts are the means by which a martial artist achieves the higher levels of development, and develops his kokoro. The most basic form of development comes from just surviving the rigors of practice and coming back for more. As described by Carmen Blacker (1975), enduring hardship has been seen as purifying the individual in Japan and drawing closer to the kami. The hard practices of the martial arts have much the same goal, to purify the individual, and awaken greater abilities and powers within him. In Japan there are often special, especially rigorous, practices held at what are traditionally the hottest and coldest times of the year, and to celebrate the new year. It is not uncommon to see reports of groups training in a river or in the ocean on the TV news at New Year's, especially if there is snow falling for added visual effect. The hot summer training is not as visually enticing for TV news crews, but it is at least as trying for those who take part in it. These intensive practices last for a week to ten days, and are meant to burn out any impurities in body, mind, or spirit. If nothing else, after surviving one of these practices, day-to-day problems seem much smaller than they did before.

Aikido is a modern part of this tradition. All of the spiritual practices that have been mentioned were a part of the life of Aikido's founder, Ueshiba Morihei, and modern Aikido practice preserves many of these and other traditional religious practices.

The Life of Ueshiba Morihei

Morihei Ueshiba was born on December 14, 1883 in the village of Tanabe in what is now Wakayama prefecture, Japan. Ueshiba's father was a prosperous farmer and merchant, as well as being a local councilman. Reportedly, Ueshiba was a weak child. However, encouraged by his father he took up sumo, running and swimming to build up his body.

Ueshiba's education was not unusual. Although the new Japanese government had recently established a national education system, it had not yet built the schools necessary to teach every student in Japan. Thus Ueshiba started his education at the local terako, or temple school, transferring to the public elementary school when that was completed. Although he started junior high

school, he soon transferred to an abacus school. Here he proved to be an especially adept student, rising from student to assistant instructor after only a year. Ueshiba soon left this post for a position in the local tax office. He held this post until he became involved in a dispute between the government and local fishermen who were being squeezed by new government regulations and large scale-fishing operations. His involvement on the side of the local fishermen led to his resignation.

Following this, in late 1901, Ueshiba's father provided him with money with which Ueshiba went to Tokyo and opened a stationery store. The only notable thing about this trip is that this was Ueshiba's first real encounter with the classic martial arts of Japan. Apparently, young Ueshiba studied Tenjin Shinyo Ryu jujutsu and Shinkage Ryu swordsmanship. This episode did not last long though. Ueshiba soon became sick with beriberi and he closed the store and returned to Tanabe.

In 1903, Ueshiba enlisted in the army and was assigned to the 37th regiment of the Fourth Division, in Osaka. What is most important about this is that it was during this period that Ueshiba began to study martial arts seriously. He became a student of Yagyu Ryu jujutsu under Masakatsu Nakai, in Sakai, Osaka. While in the army, Ueshiba was also stationed in Manchuria for a year-and-a-half.

Following his discharge from the army in 1907, Ueshiba returned to Tanabe. Ueshiba was reportedly moody and depressed while living in Tanabe, often taking his sword and disappearing into the mountains to fast and train. He also performed mizugori daily. Mizugori is a traditional ascetic practice in Japan, involving pouring buckets of cold water over one's head and body to purify oneself and draw closer to the kami. Ueshiba's father had a dojo built on the family property and invited a prominent judoka, Kiyoichi Takagi, to train Ueshiba. Ueshiba also continued his training in Yagyu Ryu jujutsu, commuting to Osaka periodically to train there. Eventually he received a teaching license from the Yagyu Ryu in 1908.

In 1910 Ueshiba became interested in a government project to settle the northern island of Hokkaido. After making a tour of Hokkaido, he arranged for recruiting in Tanabe, eventually gathering over eighty people to settle the area of Shiratake, in Hokkaido. On March 29, 1912, Ueshiba and his party set out for Hokkaido, leaving his wife and young daughter behind in Tanabe until appropriate accommodations could be constructed (Ueshiba had married in 1902).

The pioneers worked hard, and by the third year the fields were producing a decent yield, and their timber business was showing a profit. What was most important about this adventure was not the success of the pioneers however, but the fact that it was here that Ueshiba first encountered Takeda Sokaku, the founder of Daito Ryu aiki-jutsu.

Initially, Ueshiba had little opportunity to practice martial arts in Hokkaido, but he was obsessed with physical strength, felling trees by himself, uprooting stumps with his bare hands, and playing tug-of-war with draft horses. He also continued to meditate alone on the mountains, and he didn't stop his practice of performing mizugori daily, which in northern Hokkaido in the winter would be an extreme ascetic practice indeed!

Takeda Sokaku was famous in Japan as an unrivaled jujutsu master, and he was invited to Hokkaido by the prefectural police to train them to deal with the gangsters and highwaymen who were running wild in this frontier. Ueshiba met Takeda on a trip to the town of Engaru, and after being easily defeated by Takeda in a demonstration, Ueshiba, who, partly because of his great physical strength, was unaccustomed to losing to anyone, asked for admission to Takeda's Daito Ryu. Ueshiba immediately became a student of Takeda's, spending the next thirty days training with him. At the end of this time, Ueshiba was awarded a first level teaching license in Daito Ryu. His absence caused some concern in Shiratake, since he didn't tell anyone there what he was doing, and it was concluded that he must have died in a blizzard.

When he returned to Shiratake, Ueshiba constructed a dojo on his own property and invited Takeda to live with him and teach there. This was a martial arts apprenticeship in the traditional mode. Ueshiba was expected to personally take care of all of Takeda's needs, including the preparation of his food and bath. In the course of his career, Takeda had killed several people and so was suspicious of everyone, suspecting his food of being poisoned, and there being an assassin around every corner. Because of this, Takeda was an especially demanding master, requiring, among other things, that everything be taste-tested in his presence.

With Takeda in residence, Ueshiba would study privately with Takeda for two hours every day, as well as seeing to all of Takeda's daily needs and tending to his own business. It was at this time that Ueshiba learned many of the techniques which would later become Aikido. The art that Ueshiba learned from Takeda was one which employed a variety of wrist locks and throws. The emphasis was upon timing and blending with one's opponent. One vital element of Ueshiba's Aikido was strikingly absent from Takeda's Daito Ryu aiki-jutsu. This was the philosophy of love, spiritual harmony, and personal and world development that set Aikido apart from many of the classical bujutsu systems of Japan, and even from most of the more modern budo systems such as Judo. The older bujutsu system had little place for love or universal harmony.

In 1919 Ueshiba abruptly and permanently left Hokkaido. The ostensible reason for this is the grave illness of his father, although this does not seem to have been the real motivation. Before he heard of his father's illness, he had already sent his wife and children back to Tanabe. His home and land he gave to Takeda. In addition, on the way back to Tanabe, Ueshiba detoured to Ayabe, in Kyoto prefecture, to visit the headquarters of Oomoto-kyo, a newly founded religious

group. He met the leader of the group, Deguchi Onisaburo. According to his various biographers, while praying in the Oomoto shrine,

Suddenly an apparition of his father appeared before him. Then another figure emerged form the darkness, saying, "What do you see?"

"My father," Morihei replied sadly. "He looks so old and wasted away."

"Your father is fine." Onisaburo gently said to Morihei. "Let him go."

Ueshiba was fascinated with the Oomoto-kyo headquarters in Ayabe, and stayed several days, studying the doctrine and practicing Oomoto's meditation and purification techniques. By the time he reached Tanabe, his father had died, peacefully. (Stevens 1987, 23)

It seems likely that Ueshiba had heard of Oomoto-kyo while living in Hokkaido. It is reasonable to assume that Ueshiba had been on a spiritual quest nearly his entire life, judging from his on-going habits of meditating on mountains and performing daily misogi in the traditional mizugori manner. In addition, Ueshiba could not have been ignorant of the spiritual aspect of the martial arts, since the Japanese government had been promoting the martial arts as a means of developing the spirit of the Japanese people since the Meiji Restoration.

Based on these facts, I believe that Ueshiba, having heard of Oomoto-kyo in Hokkaido, and probably having read some of their literature (as Oomoto-kyo had a very active printing division, which included a national newspaper), Ueshiba left Hokkaido with the intention of investigating Oomoto-kyo for himself. It is possible he intended to join Oomoto-kyo even before he left Hokkaido.

Within a few months of his father's death, Ueshiba moved his entire family to Ayabe, to live at the Oomoto compound there. This was not a light decision, because every member of his family objected. His wife and his mother especially wondered how the family would support itself. John Stevens quotes his wife as having complained "Why leave this place when we have productive land and fine neighbors? Are the gods that you say are calling you going to pay you a salary?" (Stevens 1987, 23).

In Ayabe, Ueshiba quickly became integrated into the daily life of Oomoto-kyo. Two of the basic beliefs in Oomoto-kyo are the importance of natural food, and that art is the mother of religion. Having been a farmer his entire life, the first of these teachings was not difficult for him to put into practice in the Oomoto-kyo fields. The second teaching led him to take up both calligraphy and poetry.

After moving to Ayabe, Ueshiba continued his martial arts practice alone, but when a fire brigade was organized, he helped train them, including in basic self-defense techniques. Shortly after this, the leader of Oomoto-kyo, Deguchi Onisaburo, asked Ueshiba to teach budo to other members. A building was

remodeled, and became the "Ueshiba Dojo," Ueshiba's first dojo. There were probably two reasons for this turn of events. The first would have been to build members' strength, health and character through the practice of traditional arts. Secondly, it was probably to train a group of bodyguards for Deguchi, since the Japanese government was beginning to look askance at some of his teachings.

The martial art that Ueshiba was teaching at this time was Daito-ryu aiki-jutsu. It was fundamentally the art that he had learned from Takeda. In fact, Takeda visited the dojo in Ayabe on two occasions.

On February 11, 1921, the government raided the Oomoto-kyo headquarters in what is known as "The First Oomoto-kyo Incident." Based on rumors from disgruntled ex-members, and allegations from government spies, the police raided the headquarters and arrested many of the leaders, including Deguchi. Although most of the charges eventually had to be dropped, including those hoarding weapons, Deguchi was found guilty of lese majesty and given a five-year sentence.

It was upon Deguchi's release from prison that Ueshiba seems to have moved into the inner circle of Oomoto-kyo activities, when Deguchi made Ueshiba his personal bodyguard. Ueshiba had already absorbed a great deal of Oomoto-kyo's teachings, including meditation techniques and purification rites, which include a revived form of the traditional Shinto purification ritual chinkon-kishin. As Deguchi's bodyguard and confidant, Ueshiba also learned a great deal of Oomoto-kyo's kotodama4 (word-spirit) teachings.

In 1924, Deguchi started to put into action his dream of founding a nation based upon his religious teachings. With Ueshiba and a few other followers, he set out on what is known as the "Mongolian Adventure." In the course of traveling to Mongolia, Deguchi and his band relied upon the assistance of Japanese already in the area to arrange things with various warlords. In this they became the pawns of both the Japanese, who were generally agents of Japan's Black Dragon Society seeking to gain a foothold in China for Japan, and the warlords themselves. They made it to Mongolia, but were there double-crossed by one of the warlords. They were arrested, and sentenced to execution. Although the Chinese probably never intended to carry out the execution, no one told the prisoners that. They were released to a Japanese envoy only after they had been brought before the firing squad.

What is notable about this adventure for Ueshiba is that this is when he reportedly first developed what might be called "super-human powers." The journey across China to Mongolia was long, and certainly not easy. To add to the difficulties of bad or no roads, and negotiating with each successive warlord as they crossed his territory, they were frequently attacked by bandits. On one of these occasions, Ueshiba claimed to have developed the power to see the path of someone's intentions. Whenever someone was going to fire a gun, he would see a

ball of light shoot out from the gun just before the trigger was pulled. Stevens (1987, 32) quotes Ueshiba in an oft repeated story;

> As we neared Baian Dalai we were trapped in a valley and showered with bullets. Miraculously, I could sense the direction of the projectiles-beams of light indicated their paths of flight-and I was able to dodge the bullets. The ability to sense an attack is what the ancient masters of the martial arts meant by "anticipation." If one's mind is steady and pure, one can immediately perceive aggression and counter it-that, I realized, is the essence of aiki.

This is the first incident in Ueshiba's life that introduces him as being extra-ordinary, something beyond that which could be called humanly possible. This is the first development and demonstration of super-human powers that Ueshiba is said to have possessed.

Upon returning to Japan, Ueshiba continued his life at Ayabe, soaking up more and more of Deguchi's mystical teachings, both about kotodama, and the meanings hidden within the ancient writings of Kojiki. These would greatly color his teachings later on, particularly after World War II.

In 1925, Ueshiba was challenged to a duel by a naval officer and high ranking kendo (Japanese style swordfighting) practitioner. For a martial artist to be challenged in this way was very common at this time, and Ueshiba regularly faced such challenges. Following this duel however, Ueshiba had an intense mystical experience. Ueshiba went into his garden to wash off the sweat from the duel, and get a drink. Stevens (1987, 32; see also Stone and Meyer 1995, 5; and Saotome 1993, 10) gives the most detailed account of this incident:

Suddenly Morihei started to tremble and he felt immobilized. The ground beneath his feet began to shake, and he was bathed with rays of pure light streaming down from heaven. A golden mist engulfed his body, causing his petty conceit to vanish, and he himself assumed the form of a Golden Being. Morihei perceived the inner workings of the cosmos and further perceived that "I am the Universe." The barrier between the material, hidden, and divine worlds crumbled; simultaneously Morihei verified that the heart of budo was not contention but rather love, a love that fosters and protects all things.

In addition, according to Stevens, Ueshiba's "sixth sense of anticipation was completely developed, and he was now invincible as a martial artist" (Stevens 1987, 33). It is true that after this event, Ueshiba was undefeated. Of course, prior to this, the only serious defeat he had suffered was at the hands of Takeda Sokaku.

Ueshiba's skill as a martial artist became more widely known, as he began training some members of the local military as well as the Oomoto-kyo members. This drew the notice of high-ranking members of the Imperial Army and Navy. In the late 1920s he was repeatedly invited to Tokyo to give demonstrations to high-ranking military personnel. He was also invited to move to Tokyo and open a dojo there. Finally, in 1929, with the blessings of Deguchi, he accepted an invitation and sponsorship from Admiral Takeshita Isamu.

Deguchi felt that Ueshiba's evolving martial art would be his means of teaching peace, brotherhood, love, and the importance of art in religion. He told Ueshiba "Budo will be your yusai, a practice to manifest the divine" (Stevens 1987, 37). This separation from Deguchi was very fortunate for Ueshiba. Oomoto-kyo was beginning to do things that would eventually lead to its near destruction. Oomoto-kyo began training a militia, stockpiling arms, and Deguchi started dressing like the emperor. In 1935 the Japanese police raided the Ayabe and Kamaeoka headquarters of Oomoto-kyo and arrested all of the leading members of the sect, including Deguchi, who was imprisoned and not released until 1942.

Although Ueshiba had maintained very close ties with Oomoto-kyo and Deguchi, he was not arrested in the nation-wide sweep of Oomoto-kyo members. His martial arts instruction had brought him in contact with a great many influential people in the Japanese military and national police. On the day of the sweep, Ueshiba was among those sought by the national police headquarters in Tokyo, but he was in Osaka teaching at the local police station. The chief-of-police in Osaka, Tomita Kenji, had Ueshiba sent to Sonezake, whose chief-of-police hid Ueshiba in his own house. Meanwhile they stalled those in Tokyo who wanted him, while Ueshiba's supporters in the military pulled strings to get him off the list of the wanted, on the grounds that he was too important as a military asset to arrest merely because of some connections to a discredited religious organization.

Throughout the thirties, Ueshiba taught his martial art, which by this time he was calling "aiki-budo." Ueshiba was teaching at his home dojo in Tokyo, in Takeda for Oomoto-kyo, the Toyama Military Academy, the Naval Academy, the Military Staff College, and the Military Police Academy, in addition to training trips to Manchuria for the military there. He became very well connected, teaching leaders of both the civilian government and the military. His students even included the Prime Minister, Admiral Tojo.

In 1942, however, Ueshiba retired and withdrew to the country-side of Iwama, in Ibaragi prefecture, where he had acquired about 17 acres of farmland, a good-sized lot in Japan. Ueshiba felt that

The military is dominated by reckless fools ignorant of statesmanship and religious ideals who slaughter innocent citizens indiscriminately and destroy everything in their path. They act in total contradiction to God's will, and they will surely come to a sorry end. True budo is to nourish life and foster peace, love,

and respect, not to blast the world to pieces with weapons. (Stevens 1987, 47)

The farm in Iwama did not have a house, so Ueshiba bought a farmer's shed and had it converted into a house for himself and his wife. His circumstances in Iwama were considerably different from those in Tokyo. In Iwama he was just another farmer. This suited Ueshiba quite well since he was able to live a life that accorded with his religious ideals. The dojo in Tokyo he left in the hands of his son Kisshomaru. In Iwama Ueshiba was able to rest, train, and farm. He was also able to build the Aiki Shrine.

Japan is dotted with small shrines built to honor and venerate any one of the yaoyoruzu kami-literally the "eight million gods and spirits." These shrines can be so small they fit on a small pedestal by the side of the road or as large as the massive complexes in Ise and Kumano. The Aiki Shrine in Iwama is small, but still large enough to have a small outer building to accompany and guard the tiny inner shrine where the gods dwell. There the 42 guardian deities of Aikido are enshrined as well as the Great Spirit of Aiki. Here Ueshiba prayed, and in the dojo he built next to the shrine he practiced, preserving his Aikido throughout World War II and during the years of the Occupation when all martial arts practice was banned by the Americans. Out in the countryside, far from the eyes of the authorities, Ueshiba was able to continue practicing and teaching Aikido without interruption.

In 1948, soon after the ban on the practice of martial arts was lifted, the Aikikai (Aikido Association) was established, with headquarters in Tokyo. Ueshiba stayed in Iwama practicing Aikido, and the meditation and purification rites of Oomoto-kyo. From about 1950 on, Ueshiba began traveling and teaching throughout Japan again. It was at this time that he began to emphasize the philosophical and spiritual aspects of Aikido more and more. It is this version of Aikido that most Westerners are familiar with.

Aikido began to spread internationally in 1953. Members of Hawaii's Japanese-American community had seen Aikido while stationed in Japan during the Occupation, and petitioned the Aikikai to send an instructor to Hawaii to teach. Then head instructor at the Hombu (headquarters) Dojo, Tohei Koichi, was sent to Hawaii to teach for several months. The people he was instructing there were already generally accomplished martial artists in Judo, kendo and karate. From this time on, Tohei made annual trips to Hawaii to teach and conduct rank testing.

Around this time, another of Ueshiba's pre-Occupation students started his own Aikido organization. Shioda Gozo founded Yoshinkan Aikido in the early fifties, with the blessings of Ueshiba and the Aikikai. Yoshinkan was the first major off-shoot from Ueshiba's Aikido. It is a very hard-hitting style of Aikido, and has been adopted by the National Police Agency in Japan as one of its official arts. While it teaches the philosophy of aiki (harmonious energy), it doesn't focus on the

spiritual aspects that Ueshiba began to heavily emphasize in the post-war era. To this day, the Aikikai and Yoshinkan maintain a friendly relationship. The same cannot be said for later off-shoots.

Tohei continued to make regular overseas teaching trips, and foreigners in Japan began to discover and study Aikido on their own. By the early 1960s there were a number of experienced aikidoka (Aikido practitioners) with black belt ranks in Hawaii. Some of these moved to California in the early 1960s and began teaching Aikido there. At this time, Tohei Koichi was the only contact with Aikido for people in America. Ueshiba was just a legend.

Technically, what Tohei was teaching was the same as what Ueshiba was teaching. Tohei had a different emphasis however. Where Ueshiba's emphasis was on the harmony, the ai portion of Aikido, Tohei's emphasis was on the ki. Tohei had been a member of Jukukai, which taught meditation, chanting and rituals for developing one's ki, and Tohei was teaching Aikido as a means to develop one's ki. There was some disagreement about Tohei's teachings within the Aikikai.

Aikido After Ueshiba

When Ueshiba died in 1969, Tohei was the Chief Instructor at the Hombu Dojo in Tokyo, and the only official tenth dan (tenth degree black belt), a rank indicating complete mastery of the art. Ueshiba's son and heir, Kisshomaru, did not approve of Tohei's non-standard teachings and began putting pressure on him to stop teaching them.

This situation created a great deal of stress within the Aikikai, and as Chie Nakane says in Japanese Society, "the sudden removal of the leader is a severe blow, and automatically brings a 'household rebellion' (the Japanese term for an internal struggle)" (Nakane 1971, 46). As Nakane describes, in Japan there are no strong horizontal ties within an organization; the strong ties that hold an organization together are all vertical, elder to junior, ties. When Ueshiba died, it was inevitable that there be some sort of split between the Ueshiba's immediate subordinates. All of the top instructors at the Hombu Dojo had their ties directly to the senior Ueshiba, and only Tohei was teaching anything very different from the others.

Therefore, when this struggle began, Tohei had few supporters within the Aikikai; his loyal students were mostly in the classes outside the Aikikai. On the other hand, Kisshomaru was teaching Aikido very much as his father had taught it, he was one of the most senior instructors in Aikido, and he had the influence of Japan's tradition of patrilineal inheritance. Thus within a few years, Tohei was functionally ostracized by the Aikikai, although not outright expelled. This is a common way of dealing with problems in Japan. The Japanese seek to avoid face-to-face conflict, so the preferred means of getting rid of someone is to make life so uncomfortable that they leave, and this is what Tohei did.

This caused a major rift in international Aikido, although it is doubtful anyone in the Aikikai realized that this would happen. It is even less likely that they would have done anything differently if they had realized.5 Within Japan, the only people who followed Tohei when he left the Aikikai to found his own organization and style of Aikido were his own direct students, most of whom also took part in his ki development classes outside the Aikikai. It was outside of Japan that Tohei had most of his devoted students. Frank Doran says:

Aikido in the United States was primarily influenced, if not totally influenced, by Tohei Sensei. . . . There wasn't much talk of O-Sensei.6 The teachers were all talking about Tohei, which I don't think was a deliberate fault. They all talked with pride about their teacher, who was Tohei. . . . It wasn't just Tohei; it was just Tohei if you were in the United States. (Stone and Meyer 1995, 136)

Tohei formed his own Aikido organization in 1974, when he formally resigned from the Aikikai. He called his style of Aikido Shin Shin Toitsu Aikido, "Aikido with Body and Mind Integration," and his organization is called The Ki Society in English. When he formed this organization, he asked all of the dojos that he had started in the United States to split with the Aikikai as well. Many of them did. This was the real beginning of the splintering of Aikido. Since this split, Tohei has developed a large international organization for the investigation of ki and the promotion of his style of Aikido based just outside of Tokyo. His headquarters is said to be the largest dojo in the world.

>From this initial split in Japan have come most of the splinter groups in America. The largest of these is the American branch of Tohei's Ki Society, which teaches what it calls Ki Aikido, and Ki Atsu Therapy, a therapy system developed by Tohei that involves the manipulation of a bodies ki energy, and the direct application of ki by a therapist. The emphasis is on ki as an important form of natural energy, how to develop and make use of it.

Next in size is probably Seidokan Aikido, founded by one of Tohei's disciples about ten years after the split with the Aikikai. Rod Kobayashi, a Hawaiian born Japanese-American, split with Tohei's Ki Society because he felt there had been a reduction in the amount of Aikido as a martial art being taught in Ki Society dojos, and he felt that it was important to maintain that part of Aikido.7 He formed Seidokan Aikido in the early 1980s. He sought and received the approval and recognition of Doshu Kisshomaru for his new organization, which emphasizes using the techniques of Aikido to teach what his calls "the aiki attitude."

There have been a number of other splits from the Ki Society. Of those about which I have been able to gather any information, they generally seem to be moving back towards the Aikikai in an attempt to balance the ki teachings and much softer, less combative style of Aikido practice of the Ki Society with the much harder and more martial aspects of traditional Aikido. The Ki Society had

been moving away from the more combat oriented style of Aikido to a softer, less martial style, and many of those who have left it feel that it is important to maintain the strong martial effectiveness of their Aikido practice.

There are also a number of Aikido organizations that are not affiliated with any of the traditional organizations. These include Suenaka-Ha Tetsugaku-ho Aikido, another off-shoot from the Ki Society, and Jiyushinkai, an off-shoot of Tomiki-Ryu Aikido. There are also numerous unaffiliated, independent dojos. These dojos are generally run by black belts who have become disgusted with the politics in the existing organizations, and who do not want to start another organization.

Within the United States are also several Aikikai affiliated organizations headed by various rival Japanese shihan (master instructors) from the Aikikai, who often have difficulty dealing with each other, for the same sociological reasons that forced Tohei out of the Aikikai. These organizations, while not giving each other's ranks very much respect, all respect Aikikai ranks and recognize Ueshiba Kisshomaru as Doshu (Leader of the Way), and world-wide head of Aikido.

In addition, Yoshinkan Aikido has numerous representatives teaching in the United States, both Japanese and American, and several splinter organizations. One in the Midwest is headed by Kushida Sensei in Michigan. Like the Ki Society and Aikikai split, Kushida's Yoshokai was started after Shioda Gozo, founder of Yoshinkai, died, and there was a disagreement over how the organization would be run.

There have been numerous splits within the world Aikido community, and some of these splits are quite acrimonious. Despite this acrimony at the international level, within the United States, the general attitude is one of openness and cooperation. Rather than compete with each other, the various styles more often work together. When high ranking teachers from Japan give seminars in the United States, though the seminars are usually sponsored by one style, practitioners of any style are welcome to attend.

This attitude is strikingly different from attitudes often encountered in Japan, where membership in one style can make it impossible to practice in dojos of a different, but related style. This difference seems to be directly related to what is generally considered to be Aikido's most attractive feature for Americans, its non-confrontational philosophy emphasizing harmony. This is popularly seen as being the attraction for Americans since the 1960s and the counter-culture. This philosophical emphasis allows people to study combat skills without compromising personal beliefs. It blends well with modern ideas about living in harmony with the environment and with non-violence beliefs. The idea of harmony with the universe complements the environmentalist ideal of living in harmony with nature. At the same time Aikido's technical syllabus emphasizing controlling techniques rather than striking, enables people opposed to violence ro learn self-defense skills without compromising their personal beliefs. Aikido's

growth may well be a mirror of the growth of these ideals thorough American society.

Chapter III

The Spiritual Writings of Aikido

Introduction

In Aikido as a spiritual/religious practice, the most fundamental sources of guidance are the writings of the founder of Aikido. Many of these have been translated into English, primarily by John Stevens, a high ranking American Aikido practitioner and professor of Buddhist Studies at Tohoku Fukushi College in Sendai, Japan. Stevens' translations of Ueshiba's writings, and his own books on Aikido, represent an important literary source for American students of Aikido. His compilations, The Essence of Aikido: The Spiritual Teachings of Morihei Ueshiba, and The Art of Peace, as well as his translation of Ueshiba's pre-war book Budo, are the primary source of Ueshiba's writings for the non-Japanese reading American.

However, Ueshiba's writings represent only a tiny portion of what has been written about Aikido. Writing about Aikido is growing industry, with two major magazines, and numerous new books about Aikido published annually. These writings touch on every aspect of Aikido, from simple technical manuals describing the techniques of Aikido to complex theories for the application of Aikido in psychological practice to books explicating the spiritual and religious significance of Aikido.

After examining the writings of Ueshiba, I will look at three other books on Aikido. First will be Aikido and the Harmony of Nature, by Ueshiba's student, Mitsugi Saotome (1993). This book looks at the spiritual, religious and philosophical implications of Ueshiba's teachings. The second book is the only English language book-length biography of Ueshiba to date, Abundant Peace, by John Stevens (1987). Last, Aikido in America, a collection of interviews with leading American practitioners of Aikido, put together by John Stone and Ron Meyer (1995) will be discussed.

Ueshiba's Writings

The Art of Peace is a collection of doka or teaching poems written by Ueshiba to illustrate particular points and lessons within Aikido. The Essence of Aikido covers a much broader field. The book is divided into five chapters. The first chapter presents the cosmology of Ueshiba. This cosmology is essentially that of Deguchi,

and is a rich blend of ancient Shinto mythology and Oomoto-kyo kotodama theory. The second chapter is a collection of doka, translated and presented side-by-side with the original Japanese. The third chapter is a collection of Ueshiba's calligraphy, some of it straightforward, some of it dealing with the spiritual aspects of Ueshiba's beliefs. The fourth chapter explains something of Ueshiba's beliefs concerning misogi, and is filled with pictures of Ueshiba performing various acts of misogi, including training under a cold mountain waterfall. The final chapter consists of photographs of Ueshiba practicing the core of his teachings, the techniques of Aikido.

Ueshiba's kotodama theory basically holds that sound is at the heart of creation, that certain "seed" sounds are fundamental to the creation of the universe, and that the proper use of these sounds can transform the world. The essential sound is "su." "Su" is the first sound of creation, and all sounds, and everything else in creation emanates from it. "Su" expands outward to form/become the five vowel sounds of Japanese, a, i, u, e, and o.

The kotodama theory is not, in my experience, part of Aikido in the United States; it does not seem to have made the cultural leap. This is not surprising considering that it is based upon obscure Oomoto-kyo teachings, and most of Ueshiba's disciples were not members of Oomoto-kyo. They would listen to his kotodama lectures, but were not interested in them. The only place I have found anything connected to this is that in Seidokan dojos, where, when practicing misogi breathing, the sound of your exhalation should be a long, drawn-out "su."

This kotodama theory translates the sounds into Shinto mythology, with different sounds and sound combinations representing various Shinto deities from the Kojiki. These deities are utterly unknown to most modern Japanese, which only serves to make the theories that much more impenetrable for modern Japanese, to say nothing of non-Japanese.

Of far more importance for Americans are Ueshiba's doka, or as Stevens colorfully, and accurately, calls them "Songs of the Path" (Ueshiba 1993, 39). Ueshiba's doka range from seemingly simple descriptions of Aikido technique, to deeply symbolic descriptions of reality. Quoting from the preface of one of Ueshiba's Japanese collections:

Those who train in Aikido must never forget that the teaching has to be forged in one's very body. Always keep in mind the Divine workings of creation, from beginning to end, and ceaselessly learn from the gods. Make the entire universe your dojo. This is the great meaning of Budo. (Ueshiba 1993, 39)

For Ueshiba, the practice of Aikido, like the practice of any art for a member of Oomoto-kyo, was a means of promoting the Divine within oneself, and ultimately a means for achieving unification with the Divine.

Many of Ueshiba's doka were lessons of strategy and technique. Others were lessons about the mystical and spiritual side of Aikido, and how Aikido relates to God and the Divine. The examples below show how Ueshiba viewed the connection between his religion and Aikido.

> The Divine Will
> Permeating body and soul
> is the blade of Aiki:
> Polish it, make it shine
> throughout this world of ours!
> (Ueshiba 1993, 41)

This doka makes it quite explicit that Aikido is an activity that is intimately connected with religion.

> Aiki-[its mysteries]
> can never be encompassed
> by the brush or by the mouth.
> Do not rely on words to grasp it,
> attain enlightenment through practice!
> (Ueshiba 1993, 41)

Though Ueshiba was hardly a Buddhist, still the idea of enlightenment, or sudden, individual understanding about the true nature of things, is such a common idea in Japan after a millennium and a half of exposure to Buddhism that it can be seen here when Ueshiba describes attaining true understanding through Aikido.

> Protecting the Way
> of gods and buddhas
> in this world of ours:
> The techniques of Aiki
> are the law of kusanagi.
> (Ueshiba 1993, 45)

Kusanagi is a reference to Shinto mythology, specifically to the sword Kusanagi, one of the three treasures of the Japanese Imperial family. Here too, we see Aikido presented in its relationship to Japanese religion. Ueshiba presents Aikido as the defender of the Way of the gods and buddhas, giving Aikido a holy purpose.

The following doka augments the holy purpose above with a divine origin.

> Taught to us by the gods,
> the grand design of the Path
> follows the Divine:
> The Path of Aiki [is the work of the]
> Angel of Purification
> (Ueshiba 1993, 45)

This doka also teaches us that Aikido follows the divine, and is a means of purification. This is important because purification, or misogi, is one of the fundamental rites of Shinto. The kami are pure and mankind is impure. In order to grow closer to the kami, men must purify themselves. By describing Aikido as a means of purification, Ueshiba is intimately connecting his Aikido, the Way of harmonious energy, with Shinto, the Way of the Gods.

> Techniques of purification
> taught by futomani
> and the gods.
> Aiki[do] was established
> by the Divine.
> (Ueshiba 1993, 55)

> Master the Divine
> Techniques of Aiki
> and no foe
> will dare
> to challenge you.
> (Ueshiba 1993, 74)

The ideas that Aikido comes from the gods, that Aikido is a means of misogi, and that Aikido is a way of practicing and expressing the will of the gods is heard

throughout Ueshiba's writings.

> Foster and polish
> the warrior spirit
> while serving in the world;
> illuminate the Path in accordance
> with the Divine Will.
> (Ueshiba 1993, 61)

> A warrior receives
> the gift of life
> and establishes life everywhere;
> Love is life, the essence
> of the divine Plan.
> (Ueshiba 1993, 62)

> Steadfast and sure,
> animating the cosmos-
> the Sword of [Aiki].
> Deep learning and Bu[do], the double-edged
> instrument of the gods' grand design.
> (Ueshiba 1993, 63)

> True Victory is Self Victory!
> Harmonize yourself with the
> Divine Parent Mind-
> salvation lives right within
> your own body and soul!
> (Ueshiba 1993, 64)

From the above, it becomes clear that for Ueshiba Aikido was a holy activity that rather than being his own creation, was the creation of the kami of Shinto. This can leave little question that Aikido was intended as a religious activity by its human founder. A number of the doka also tell us that Aikido, like any of the classic do of Japan, is intended as a means of personal development for those who practice it.

Many of the above doka set forth Aikido as a form a misogi. It might therefore be useful to look at what Ueshiba had to say about misogi. He commented on it by saying:

In short, misogi is a washing away of all defilements, a removal of all obstacles, a separation from disorder, an abstention from negative thoughts, a radiant state of unadorned purity, the accomplishment of all things, a condition of lofty virtue, and a spotless environment. In misogi one returns to the very beginning, where there is no differentiation between oneself and the universe. (Ueshiba 1993, 98)

This is a very clear description of what misogi's purpose and goals were for Ueshiba. Misogi practices are Shinto in nature and origin. Through the practice of various misogi exercises, one gradually purifies oneself, thereby drawing closer to the kami. The first part of the description, ending with "a radiant state of purity" is a classic description of the state attained through misogi. The second half is a very concise description of the goals of Oomoto-kyo, the transformation of the world and unification with the divine.

As for Aikido and misogi, Ueshiba said:

Train sincerely in Aikido and evil thoughts and deeds will naturally disappear. Daily training in Aikido allows your inner divinity to shine brighter and brighter. Do not concern yourself with the right and wrong of others. Do not be calculating or act unnaturally. Keep your heart set on Aikido, and do not criticize other teachers or traditions. Aikido embraces all and purifies everything. (Ueshiba 1993, 99)

Clearly Ueshiba saw Aikido practice as a form of misogi. The practice of Aikido is a means of growing closer to and becoming one with God or the gods, improving oneself, and transforming the world. That these are also the goals of Oomoto-kyo is not coincidental. One of the reasons for practicing the arts in Oomoto-kyo is to manifest the divine within oneself. Ueshiba's martial art was intended to allow one to not only manifest the divine, but also purify oneself to make it easier to manifest and become one with the divine.

It is also worth noting that Ueshiba's Aikido and Oomoto-kyo had no real philosophical differences. Here is the basic teaching of Oomoto-kyo:

> God is spirit abiding in everything in the universe and man is the governor of the world.
>
> Where god and man unite, there follow unbounded power and authority.
>
> (Oomoto Headquarters 1935, 55)

It is easy to see from just this that Ueshiba's teachings about Aikido were strongly influenced by Oomoto-kyo teachings.

In Ueshiba's writings that have been translated into English thus far, the particular deity or deities who inspired Aikido are not specified. I suspect that this is a very important feature of Aikido. Its lessons are meant to be religious ones, but which religion, and which god(s), it is teaching us about is never made clear, so that Aikido can quite easily be something different for every person who comes to it. The practitioners of Aikido have to fill in the specifics of Aikido's lessons for themselves, individually. A few can't be bothered with it at all. For them, learning how to fight is enough. Most people who stick with Aikido for any length of time though, fill in the details of Ueshiba's lessons with material from their own background. A member of a missionary church said that God uses people for his own ends, so God could very well have inspired Ueshiba. For many, as one person put it, "there is nothing in Aikido that conflicts with the Bible." The very vagueness of Aikido's written teachings is their strength, for the open spaces can be filled with whatever the student feels most comfortable with.

Aikido and the Harmony of Nature

Mitsugi Saotome is a direct student of Ueshiba who moved to the United States in the 1970s. Now married to an American, he teaches Aikido full-time and has written several books about Aikido besides Aikido and the Harmony of Nature (1993).

Several themes emerge from Aikido and the Harmony of Nature: that Ueshiba was both enlightened and inspired by Kami; that there is no separation between self, other, individual, the universe, and God; that Aikido is a true expression of the movement of energy in the cosmos; and that through the practice of Aikido anyone can achieve unity with the universe.

On page 15 Saotome quotes Ueshiba as saying about Aikido:

> It was born through the order of Kami that I only followed and conveyed to others. Aiki is the Way of Kami. It is to be a part of the laws of the universe. It is the source of the principles of life. The history of Aikido begins with the origin of the universe. Do you think a human being could possibly have created these laws? The shrewdness of human intelligence is not enough to understand this. (Saotome 1993, 15)

These are recurring ideas throughout Aikido and the Harmony of the Universe.

Another recurring theme, and one which is suggested by the second half of the title, The Harmony of the Universe, is a somewhat sketchy monism. "The Creator and creation are one, not separate, and we are not apart from the perfect rhythm that is an expression of Holy Wisdom" (Saotome 1993, 22). This monism is an important part of Saotome's teaching, because his goal is total unification with the creator. "To truly become one with the Creator and experience satori, we must follow the laws of nature and purify the body, the heart, the spirit, even our physical surroundings" (Saotome 1993, 29). This theme of purification and unification is repeated again and again throughout the book, and Aikido is presented as the means of achieving this unity. This is most concisely stated in what Saotome calls "The Five Principles of Aikido" on page 17.

1. Aikido is the path that joins all paths of the universe throughout eternity; it is the Universal Mind that contains all things and unifies all things.

2. Aikido is the truth taught by the universe and must be applied to our lives on this earth.

3. Aikido is the principle and the path that join humanity with the Universal Consciousness.

4. Aikido will come to completion when each individual, following his or her true path, becomes one with the universe.

5. Aikido is the path of strength and compassion that leads to the infinite perfection and ever-increasing glory of God.

(Saotome 1993, 17)

This succinctly describes what Saotome is saying about Aikido throughout the book. When Saotome isn't reiterating and expanding upon these points, he is describing the necessity of purification, of misogi, for achieving unity with the universe. On page 29 he gives a detailed description of misogi, and of Aikido as a form of purification. He also talks about Ueshiba's efforts to purify himself several times throughout the book, and he reinforces this by emphasizing the

importance of Ueshiba's being pure when he achieved enlightenment.

Aikido and the Harmony of Nature talks about Aikido from a number of different angles, always emphasizing the transcendent nature of Aikido. The examples I have given here are hardly the only examples of these points in the book. Rather, they are examples of the basic themes of the book. Ueshiba achieved enlightenment through his own great efforts, and that God granted him the insight necessary to create Aikido: that there really is no separation between God and man and the Universe, all are really one; and that Aikido is the means of coming to perfect harmony with God and the Universe. This certainly meets the requirements of Spiro's definition of religion (Spiro 1966, 96), as well as providing support for the argument that Aikido practice is a religious ritual under the Lawson-McCauley theory of religious ritual (to be described below).

Abundant Peace

John Stevens is an American practitioner of Aikido who now lives in Japan, although he makes frequent trips to the United States to conduct Aikido seminars. He holds a sixth dan rank in Aikido. John Stevens has written numerous books on Aikido, ranging from purely technical manuals to books that focus on the religious and spiritual teachings of Aikido. Here I will focus on just one of his books, his biography of Ueshiba, the only book-length biography of Ueshiba available in English. Nearly every book about Aikido printed in English contains at least a brief account of Ueshiba's life, particularly his learning Daito Ryu, his ability to dodge bullets by dodging flashes of light representing the gunman's intentions, and his enlightenment and subsequent invincibility.

Stevens' book is the only lengthy account of Ueshiba's life. He breaks his account into three general sections. The first deals with Ueshiba "The Man," the second with "The Martial Artist," and the third with Ueshiba's philosophical and spiritual teachings, "The Message." What Stevens has to say in "The Message" is very much the same as the other writings looked at above, so it is the first two sections that are of interest here.

"The Man" and "The Martial Artist" contain the biographical information. The basic facts of Ueshiba's life were recounted above, but what is interesting here is how the documentable facts of Ueshiba's life have been mixed with undocumented stories about Ueshiba's powers and abilities. While Ueshiba's training in various martial arts is quite well documented in the form of contracts and dojo records, and his primary enlightenment experience is recorded in numerous brief biographies, including those written by his son, Stevens' biography includes numerous undocumented stories of Ueshiba performing fantastic feats of strength and skill, as well as stories of Ueshiba demonstrating powers of clairvoyance. Stevens even alleges that Ueshiba prophesied his own return after his death. This is the only place in which I have found this prophecy however.

Stevens recounts numerous stories of Ueshiba possessing of super-human powers. He includes a second story about Ueshiba being able to dodge bullets (Stevens 1987, 35). He also recounts several popular stories of Ueshiba anticipating attacks while the attacker is only thinking about attacking him. These stories lend to the super-human aura that popularly surrounds Ueshiba, and a number of them have entered into the popular dojo mythology about Ueshiba, i.e., that he could never be surprised, that he was not only unbeaten but unbeatable, that he knew what other people were thinking, and that he threw people without touching them.

What is perhaps most striking about Stevens' writing is the unabashed awe and reverence he piles upon Ueshiba. When mentioning some training in a style vaguely associated with some ninja schools, Stevens writes:

Ninjitsu is the antithesis of Aikido. It is an art based on stealth, deception, and dirty tricks; yet even with their reliance on the vaunted "techniques of invisibility" and an arsenal of exotic weapons, none of the famous ninja of the past could have stood a chance against the divine techniques of Morihei, formulated in accordance with the principles of love and harmony. (Stevens 1987, 71)

This degree of credibility and raw, unvarnished hero-worship is further brought out in the opening paragraph of the section on Ueshiba, "The Martial Artist." Stevens writes:

Morihei was undoubtedly the greatest martial artist who ever lived. Even if we accept every exploit of all the legendary warriors, East and West, as being literally true, none of those accomplishments can be compared to Morihei's documented ability to disarm any attacker, throw a dozen men simultaneously, and down and pin opponents without touching them, recorded scores of times in photographs, on film, and by personal testimony.

How did Morihei become invincible? (Stevens 1987, 67)

It is this belief in Ueshiba's transcendent powers that shows Stevens' Aikido as being religious in quality, for it clearly meets Spiro's definition, with two super-human agents: Ueshiba and the divinity which inspired him, the "Great Spirit of Aiki" (Stevens 1987, 81).

Aikido in America

Aikido in America is a collection of interviews with some of the leading American Aikidoists of the early 1990s. Most of the book is not about Ueshiba or the belief in the super-human within the Aikido community. Much of what the interviewees discuss has to do with the development of Aikido in the United States, historical discussions of who taught whom, and how different people came to practice Aikido or why they ended up teaching the particular flavor of Aikido that they do.

Terry Dobson is quoted saying:

> Aikido is not a religion. That's what's so devilish about Aikido. It deals with these primary forces but leaves pretty much all the detail work up to you. O-Sensei said, "Aikido leads religion to completion," which I always found and still find a very impenetrable statement. (Stone and Meyer 1995, 34)

This sums up the spiritual and religious aspects of the book quite well. Each of the interviews deals with the spiritual and religious within Aikido in its own way.

There are interviews with 13 leaders of Aikido in America, two of whom have since died. The book is divided into three sections. The first section is called "The Disciples," and deals with people who trained with Ueshiba in Japan. The second section, "The Teachers," deals with people who have led a great deal of the teaching of Aikido in America, but who do not necessarily have any training with Ueshiba. The last section is called "The Innovators," and deals with people who have taken Aikido in new directions in America.

For the purposes of this research, the first section is of the most interest, although nearly every interview deals with the spiritual side of Aikido at some point. The most interesting interviews are the first seven or so, and especially the first four, which are the group titled "The Disciples." All of these interviews focus a lot of time on what Aikido is.

None of these interviews even begins to suggest that the center of Aikido is a set of martial techniques. The techniques are only ever mentioned as means of illustrating a non-technical point. The spiritual focus is very strong, and very imprecise. Yin/yang theory is talked about quite a bit by Mary Heiny, and all of them talk about the same spirit of love that Ueshiba did. Interestingly, none of them talk about God or gods much. The major super-human agent found in these interviews is Ueshiba, and in some of the other interviews, Tohei. Ueshiba's incredible technique and ability, and Tohei's ki powers.

Aikido as a means of spiritual development is the real theme of all of these interviews, and they reflect strongly the ideas about spiritual development found in Ueshiba's doka. The ideas of love and universal harmony, and Aikido as a means of helping people develop themselves are repeated again and again. In fact, the technical side of Aikido is strongly downplayed, to the point of making simple technical development seem to be the antithesis of the goal of real Aikido. Ueshiba is quoted saying, "You know, I didn't really understand Aikido until I was in my seventies, and I didn't have my strength to rely on" (Stone and Meyer 1995, 87). And Mary Heiny talks about one day coming in and not being interested in

throwing her partner strongly, but instead being fascinated with the process, the flow of energy involved (Stone and Meyer 1995, 127).

Each of the interviews deals with the spiritual/religious aspects of Aikido in some way. The ideas of universal harmony and love are frequently mentioned, and several of the interviewees, particularly Robert Nadeau (Stone and Meyer 1995, 57-81), George Simcox (Stone and Meyer 1995, 171-189), and Wendy Palmer (Stone and Meyer 1995, 261-289), spend a great deal of time talking about how Aikido teaches practitioners about the energy of the universe, sometimes referred to as ki, and how Aikido teaches them to align themselves with this energy and to work with it.

The view of Aikido in North America presented by Aikido in America is a general one. The various teachers each present their own ideas about Aikido, and the many facets of Aikido quickly become apparent. Veiws range from the very technically oriented, which is most often mentioned with something just a shade above derision, to Aikido which is totally focused upon developing people and the world, and everything in between. The world of Aikido is one of great diversity, within which there is room for polishing all of the different facets of Aikido, with each dojo and each practitioner choosing which facets will be their specific focus.

Chapter IV

Research Results

Research Background

In the course of researching this subject, 33 individual interviews were carried out with current practitioners of Aikido. These interviews were conducted face to face with the researcher. Because the researcher is an active martial artist himself, and usually took part in practice at the various Aikido dojos where subjects were recruited, the interviewer was generally regarded as either a participant or at least a very knowledgeable outsider from a related discipline.

For this reason the research would have to be classified as that of a participant observer. It should be noted that being a participant in a martial arts dojo presents certain dangers to the researcher. Practicing a martial art means the active practice of techniques used to subdue, injure, maim, and sometimes kill people. In an Aikido dojo these techniques are practiced by having one person act as the aggressor, called uke (meaning receiver). This person receives the technique of the individual who is practicing, called shite.8 These techniques can be quite dangerous to both uke

and shite. They are dangerous to shite if shite fails to dodge or redirect uke's

attack, and dangerous to uke if shite applies a technique too vigorously or if uke fails to flow with shite's technique smoothly. It is worth noting that the researcher injured himself in the last manner, spraining his wrist. While this injury was a hindrance to actually practicing, it was also seen as an indication of the researcher's sincerity by others in the dojos where he was practicing.

In order to protect the anonymity of the interview subjects, and because of the small size of the Aikido population in the Midwestern region, the styles of the individual practitioners will not be given with their other data, nor will the individual's rank. Particularly with higher ranking members of the Aikido community, little more than an individual's rank, style and general location would be necessary to identify that individual.

Most of the interviews took place in the actual dojos where the subjects train, usually before or after practice. Several interviews took place in my car while the subjects and I were waiting for an instructor to arrive and unlock the dojo. A few of the interviews took place in restaurants or coffee shops because the dojo was unavailable. It is worth noting that the interviews in the dojos were certainly the most relaxed, with both the interviewer and the subject generally lounging on the padded floor in a very informal manner.

Surprisingly, while several individuals declined to be interviewed, most often they did so with obvious regret, declining due their inability to find the time necessary. Only one individual declined to be interviewed because of discomfort with the subject of the interview. While this might seem anomalous, within the various martial arts it is not surprising. Reputable martial arts instructors generally encourage people to find an art that suits them. It is not unusual for people to try an art, and if they don't particularly like it, to move on. Anyone very uncomfortable with the teachings of Aikido would more than likely either move to an Aikido dojo that ignores those areas that trouble them, or move on to another style. If a student wanted a technically similar style they could choose an aiki-jutsu school, or a traditional jujutsu style. For these reasons, the researcher was not surprised to find that no one was hostile to the teachings of Aikido.

The sample was chosen from volunteers at dojos in the Midwest. The Midwest region was chosen because it was accessible by car from a research base at Western Michigan University. The individuals interviewed were all volunteers chosen because they represented a broad range of ages and experience within the Aikido community.

The interviews were conducted in dojos from four different styles of Aikido, representing the three main lineages of Aikido today. The styles were Aikikai, representing the main line currently headed by Kisshomaru Ueshiba, Yoshinkan and Yoshokai, representing the Yoshinkan line founded by Gozo Shioda, and the Seidokan branch of the line founded by Koichi Tohei. It is hoped that by interviewing subjects from the three main lines of Aikido that a fairly accurate

view of the beliefs concerning Aikido in America can be presented.

Of the 33 subjects interviewed, 4 were female and 29 were male. Although all interviews were voluntary, this does reflect the general ratio of women to men in the dojos, at least on those nights the researcher was in attendance. The practitioners of the martial arts are overwhelmingly male, with a small, but usually very dedicated percentage of women. I suspect it is the unusual dedication required of women practitioners to put up with the overwhelmingly macho aura of the martial arts that causes the women to make up a much higher percentage of the yudansha (dan rank holder, dan is better known in the United States as a "black belt") than their overall numbers would cause one to expect. Of the interview subjects, one of the women holds a third dan, another a second dan, and a third holds dan rank in several martial arts outside of Aikido, and will be ready for her first dan test in Aikido in a year or two.

The interview subjects ranged quite widely in age and experience in Aikido. The youngest person interviewed was 18 and had just 2.5 years of experience in Aikido. The oldest person interviewed was 58 years old, and had started Aikido 7 years earlier. There were 6 people in the 18-29 range, 12 in the 30-39 range, 10 in the 40-49 range, and 5 in the 50-59 range. There were no subjects over the age of 58. It should be mentioned that there were people practicing in the dojos who were younger than 18 and older than 58.

The average length of time practicing Aikido was 7 years, with the shortest time being 1.5 years, and the longest 23 years. Six people had at least 10 years of active Aikido experience, and 16 people had from 5-9 years of experience in Aikido. The remaining 11 had from 1.5-4 years of experience, including one person who did not give his length of time practicing Aikido, but because of his low rank the researcher believes he could not have more than 2 years of experience.

The subjects ranged in rank from gokyu, or fifth level below shodan (beginning step), or 1st degree black belt , to yondan, or fourth degree black belt. Rank directly reflects the length of time one has practiced, as the first requirement to be met for promotion is a certain number of hours practiced. The time required per promotion varies somewhat from style to style, but all styles require progressively greater periods of time in a rank before one can be promoted to the next rank. So while only 30 hours of practice may be required for promotion from rokyu to gokyu, hundreds of hours will be required for each promotion beyond shodan. In addition to sheer time spent practicing, one must also show the requisite skill level for the rank one is testing for.

Thus an individual's rank in Aikido represents both the amount of time one has been practicing and the level of skill achieved. Among the subjects, there were two yondans (fourth degree black belts), 3 sandans (third degree), 2 nidans (second degree), and 7 shodans. The yondans had been practicing Aikido for 23 and 19 years, while the sandans had 14, 9 and 8 years of experience, the nidans had 9 and

5 years experience, and shodans ranged from 2.5 to 17 years of experience. It should be noted that promotions do not automatically occur when an individual has sufficient time and skill. One must apply for the rank and take a test that consists primarily of a formal demonstration of techniques. The shodan with only 2.5 years of experience, and the shodan with 17 years experience show the variance in promotion speed quite well. Shodan after only 2.5 years is very fast; the individual would have had to practice at every opportunity, and have tested at the very earliest possible moment. The shodan with 17 years of experience represents the other extreme, of one who practices but does not pursue rank.

Among the 19 subjects with kyu (below black belt) ranks, this variation is also evident. One man with bad knees continues to practice after 11 years, although because of his knees, he will probably never be able to take the test for shodan. Another student has reached ikkyu (last kyu rank before shodan) after only two years. It has been the researcher's observation in the other martial arts in which he is active that younger participants tend to seek rank as quickly as they can get it, while older participants are more interested in simply practicing.

The variety of religious backgrounds among the subjects was surprising because of the preponderance of subjects who had been raised Catholic. Out of 33 interview subjects, fully 19 were raised Catholic. The researcher thought perhaps this indicated that Aikido held some special attraction for people who were raised Catholic. However, after noting that ten of these subjects came from the same dojo, the researcher asked informally about this at the dojo, and was told that this was not surprising because the area where the dojo is located is overwhelmingly Catholic. The rest of the subjects showed a wider distribution with three raised Lutheran, two Episcopalian, two with no religious background, one Church of Christ, one Congregational, one Reformed Jew, one Sunni Moslem, and one Methodist.

The majority of subjects who were raised Catholic did not carry their Catholicism over to their current religious practice. The most common answer to the question "What is your current religious practice?" was "None" with 13. The other answers included: seven who were Catholics of varying degrees of activity, three non-denominational Christians, two atheists, one Reformed Jew, one Sunni Moslem, one Lutheran. The remaining four respondents included one who described himself as "open-minded," one who has had a near-death experience and is quite idiosyncratic, one best described as a pantheist, and one who takes a supermarket approach to religion, trying a lot of different things and taking what he likes from each. Interestingly, one of the respondents said that he had "a financial relationship" with the church his wife and son attend, and two others also said that they attend churches with their spouses and children although they do not believe in the teachings of those institutions.

It should be noted that this is only what people answered when queried directly about their current religious practice. As will be shown later, most of the people

who responded "None" in actuality do have religious beliefs and practices; it is simply that these do not fit into any of the current, popular religious categories in the United States. Many of these people expressed a belief in divine inspiration, which, under Spiro's definition, is clearly an expression of religious knowledge.

When the subjects were queried about their reasons for starting Aikido practice, a number of different answers were given, none of them having anything to do with religion. The closest any came were a number of subjects who said they started Aikido because they liked the philosophy. The reasons given for starting Aikido broke down into a few general categories: (a) became interested after watching someone practice Aikido (8), (b) proficient in another martial art and decided to try Aikido or add Aikido to their skills (9), (c) a general interest in learning martial arts (7), (d) exercise (4), (e) self-defense (3), (f) looking for something to do with free time (3), (g) other (2).

It had been expected that the philosophy and spirituality of Aikido would be one of the primary things that initially attracted people to Aikido. It turned out that very few of the subjects knew anything about the philosophy of Aikido before they first encountered it. Only four of the subjects made any mention of the philosophy or spirituality of Aikido when describing why they started Aikido. The researcher suspects that these were important issues for more than just the four who mentioned them, but not in the sense of being explicitly aware of the philosophy.

Karate is easily the most common image of martial arts in America. Those people who became interested in Aikido after seeing it practiced, and the martial artists who started practicing it to balance their other martial arts skills, were attracted by the technical expression of Aikido techniques which focus on blending and controlling rather than striking and breaking. This is different from becoming interested in Aikido because of its stated philosophy of harmony.

Subjects were also asked if their reasons for practicing Aikido had changed since they started. Two-thirds of the subjects said their reasons for practicing had changed in some way. They described a broad variety of ways in which their reasons for practicing had changed, and here the philosophical and religious aspects of Aikido become important.

Subjects' reasons for their continued practice of Aikido were far less specific than were their reasons for starting. Frequently they gave a group of reasons for continuing, and although their original reasons usually remained, most often they had become secondary to the subjects' main reasons for continuing. The most common reason given for their continued practice of Aikido was for self-improvement/self-development, with eight people giving some version of this as a reason for continuing. It is probable that the two people who gave spiritual reasons for continuing also fall into this category, because whenever "spiritual" came up in the course of an interview, it seemed to indicate something done to

make one a better person, as opposed to "religion" which was seen as an organized and dogmatic activity. This would bring the number of people practicing Aikido as a form of self-improvement to ten.

The next most common reason given was the philosophy of Aikido. Six subjects gave this as one of their reasons for continuing to practice Aikido. The philosophy of Aikido is not a clear-cut, secular oriented philosophy however. Aikido's philosophy presupposes a very Japanese world-view, without clear absolutes. It is one in which social harmony and avoiding direct conflict are put at a premium. Ueshiba's Aikido teaches one to apply these ideas to physical conflict. In an American dojo, the ideas of harmony and conflict avoidance are first encountered in the physical technique, and then expanded to once again apply to social situations.

Four subjects also mentioned that the social aspects of practice were a big part of why they continued to practice Aikido. It is the researcher's opinion that social involvement is a strong motivation for many other subjects as well. In the course of the interviews, the social side of the Aikido dojo came up quite often, but almost always outside of the discussion about why people practice Aikido. One very typical example came right at the end of an interview. The subject had been asked if there was anything he wanted to add that we had not discussed. His first comment was "I have lots of fun down here." He talked about the camaraderie of the dojo, and his very last comment was "And I like the bar-b-ques in the summertime."

That particular dojo had evolved into something more than just a place where people studied Aikido. It had become a strong social group as well. The members often went out to see the latest martial arts movies as a dojo. All of the other dojos where I conducted interviews had evolved into social groups to one degree or another. This seems to be a generally unrecognized, or at least unspoken reason for practicing Aikido. The members of the dojo become friends, beyond just practice partners. This is true of every dojo I have practiced at. At one dojo, members will go out to a bar after practice, at another they hold regular dojo meetings over dinner. In other words, what begins as exercise, self-defense training or a philosophical interest, frequently develops into a social activity as well, adding another reason to continue practicing.

Dimensions of Aikido

In this section, several general areas of inquiry into the beliefs and practices surrounding Aikido will be looked at in order to facilitate the examination of the variety of views found within in the Aikido community. A multi-dimensional approach has been selected so that various aspects of Aikido can be examined separately, without losing their connections to Aikido as a whole.

The dimensions to be examined are; the sacred narratives, doctrines, ethics,

social aspects, ritual aspects, and Aikido in life. Sacred Narratives will deal with practitioners' views regarding the fact that Ueshiba always attributed his abilities and the origin and creation of Aikido to divine inspiration, and individuals' attitudes regarding this.

The section pertaining to the doctrines of Aikido will deal with what are the doctrinal aspects of Aikido: the focus on harmony, blending, non-confrontation, and loving protection. These ideas may be said to make up the core of Aikido thought and transcend any divisions between the various branches of Aikido.

The ethics of Aikido will look at how these doctrines are interpreted as functioning in the dojo and in everyday life. How do practitioners perceive the ideas of harmony, blending, and non-confrontation as functioning and directing their actions both inside and outside the dojo?

The social aspects of Aikido will look at how Aikido practitioners interact inside and outside the dojo.

Ritual aspects of Aikido include the various rituals involved in entering and exiting the dojo, the opening and closing of practice, the various rituals found in some dojos during practice, and the ritual of practice itself. The variety of beliefs held by practitioners regarding these rituals will be looked at. The technical practice of Aikido will also be examined here.

The last dimension to be looked at will be "Aikido in Life." This will deal with how Aikido affects peoples lives outside the dojo, as well as with what parts of Aikido people find themselves taking home with them when they leave the dojo.

The Sacred Narratives of Aikido

The sacred narratives of Aikido include a variety of materials, not all of which are strictly narratives. First, there are the stories told about Ueshiba himself, that he could sense others' intentions to attack or that he could anticipate attacks so well that no one could even touch him. These are included in the writings of his uchi deshi, among whom is his son and successor, Kisshomaru Ueshiba. And there are Ueshiba's own writings, many of which deal with the relationship between Aikido and the kami. The ideas in the body of written Aikido thought form a clear continuum, from Ueshiba's writings, through those of Americans who have never visited Japan.

All of this rather large collection of writings provide the sources for the sacred narratives of Aikido. Informants showed a tremendous degree of variation in their knowledge of these narratives. Some of them were very familiar with all of the numerous sources of information on Ueshiba and Aikido, and read everything they could find about Aikido. Others knew very little, perhaps only what they had heard talked about in the dojo before and after practice.

It is important to emphasize that the focus of Aikido is the practice, not the literature and the stories. That Aikido is about practice is a point strongly stressed in Aikido literature, but even more so by the fact that the literature of Aikido is almost totally ignored in most dojos. If one is interested in these things, it is up to the individual student to find them out for him or her self. Almost all of the informants had at least some knowledge of these narratives however. What is interesting is how so many different views of them are able to exist within the same art, often even within the same dojo.

The variety of responses to the question "Do you believe, as is often recounted by his [Ueshiba Morihei's] biographers, that he knew other people's intentions, particularly regarding possible attacks?" was quite varied. Some simply said that "yes I do," others gave very qualified "yes" answers, and still others explained why they don't believe that.

Thirteen subjects gave nearly unqualified "yes" answers to the above question. This represents approximately 40% of those surveyed. Additionally, 15 people gave qualified answers. The qualifications nearly all had the same basic idea that Ueshiba could indeed read people's intentions, particularly intentions to attack, but that this is not a super-human skill. Particular variations on this idea ranged from one informant who feels that Ueshiba was simply about as highly advanced in these things as is possible for a human, to another who felt that this is one of the things Aikido is supposed to teach.

Finally, five informants gave unequivocal "no" answers, and one person declined to give a yes or no answer, saying instead "I don't know."

All told, 85% of the respondents indicated some measure of belief in the idea that Ueshiba could tell others intentions. Nearly half of these indicated that they believed this was an ability that transcended those of normal people. The rest provided a variety of natural explanations for this ability.

The subjects' feelings about whether or not Ueshiba was divinely inspired also showed a great deal of variety. Some people clearly said yes, others said yes, but placed the divine inspiration within their own religious system, and still others qualified their "yes" by saying that they believe divine inspiration is a fairly common thing happening frequently to people who are artistic or otherwise creative. People who said no gave a variety of reasons for saying this, and two people said they didn't know if he was divinely inspired or not.

Eighteen informants, fully 54% of those interviewed, said that they believe, or they believe it is possible, that Ueshiba was divinely inspired. Two of those who expressed this however were very clear in stating that they believe that this was from a Christian point of view. It is seems likely that a higher number of subjects felt this way, but did not express it, taking their religious point of view for granted.

This shows a degree of elasticity of belief that the researcher had not expected. It had been expected that subjects would divide into two, fairly clear groups. Instead the results show an incredible degree of shading, with some who do not subscribe to a traditional Judeo-Christian cosmology believing Ueshiba was divinely inspired, as well as a devout member of a missionary church also seeing it as reasonable that Ueshiba was divinely inspired.

In every case, those who hold these beliefs practice side-by-side with others who did not believe, in any way, that Ueshiba was divinely inspired.

It was interesting that all of these different answers could exist side-by-side in the same dojo without any conflict. This is an example of one aspect of Aikido that sets it apart from much of religious practice in the United States. In the mainstream American Protestant and Catholic traditions, statements of faith have always been touchstones of religion. The creeds of the Catholic and mainline churches are statements of what beliefs are required to be accepted as a member of the church. In the more recently established churches, especially within the fundamentalist and conservative Christian communities, declarations, or witnessing, of one's faith in Christ are de rigueur.

Within the Aikido community, statements of belief about Aikido count for very little. What is important is that one practices, and does so regularly. Practicing in Aikido requires something more than simple attendance. It requires physical exertion and physical sacrifice. It is pretty much a given that anyone who practices Aikido will eventually be injured in practice. This is an accepted part of Aikido. People who do not practice regularly will never be fully accepted within the community.

Spoken words count for very little in any of the Japanese martial arts. The researcher can testify that it is quite possible to go entire classes without any conversation between practitioners, the only words spoken being those to count off repetitions of warm up exercises and to tell people to start and stop. This holds true for Aikido as well.

In such an atmosphere then, the only things that really count are that one comes to practice, and one puts forth sincere effort. This includes practicing as much as one is able when injured (which the researcher did after spraining a wrist), and if one is unable to practice because of an injury, coming to practice to watch from the sidelines. This level of dedication is not in any way uncommon.

This means of judging the community represents a radical departure from traditional American religion. It also makes it much more comfortable for people with, for example, radically different views on the founder and the creation of Aikido to practice together than American churches make it for people from very different religious views to worship together.

This is the crux of the situation with the sacred narratives of Aikido. While they do exist, they are not overly important for the Aikido community. Even having any direct knowledge of them is not important. It is entirely possible for someone to achieve a high rank in Aikido without reading any of the Aikido literature cited here. In Aikido the only statement of faith that really counts is the statement made by your presence at practice on a regular basis.

The Doctrine of Aikido

This is an unexpectedly difficult thing to describe because although there are literally dozens of books on Aikido, and hundreds of local dojo newsletters published in English every year, the real doctrine of Aikido is not contained in words. In fact, over and over in the interview process, I was told that words cannot accurately describe Aikido. The true doctrine of Aikido is contained within, and explicated by, the practice of Aikido in the dojo. Written words are considered warped, pale reflections of Aikido, at best. Photographs probably have a higher standing for explaining the doctrine of Aikido than do words. But the only thing that can really make clear the doctrine of Aikido is practice.

This goes back to the point made above, that statements of faith really don't count for anything in the Aikido community, and that what is important is that one practices. The basic ideas of Aikido can be talked and written about, but they do not become truly clear and apparent until one begins practicing the techniques of Aikido. Ueshiba, his numerous uchi-deshi, and countless other Aikido practitioners have written about the core ideas of Aikido: Harmony, Non-aggression, Not opposing directly, Redirecting rather than blocking, Loving protection of all things. But in an Aikido dojo, these essential doctrines of Aikido are not talked about. They are practiced in the most physical way possible. One person is told to hit another person. The supposed victim is not to try to stop the attack. Rather they are to blend with it, redirect it, and take control of the other person. Non-confrontation, harmonizing, redirecting, lovingly protecting the aggressor from unnecessary injury. These lessons become vividly real when not learning them means something different than getting one wrong on a multiple-choice test. Here, if you get one wrong, you are liable to get one in the nose as well.

Many of the techniques cannot be done unless the attack is strong and sincere. This means that if you don't blend with an attack fast enough, the aggressor cannot stop the attack in time to avoid hitting you in the face! This gives the lessons of Aikido a concreteness that mere words cannot convey. It also means that all of the doctrines of Aikido are practical, rather than theoretical.

Unfortunately, one side effect of this tremendous concreteness is that it can be very difficult to explain the doctrines of Aikido to anyone who has not practiced it. The ideas come off sounding wishy-washy when merely talked about without the experience of practice.

It can probably be most accurately said that the doctrine of Aikido is contained in Ikkyo, Nikkyo, Sankyo, Yonkyo, Gokyo, Shihonage, and the other techniques of Aikido. This doctrine is very stable within the Aikido community. All of the various Aikido dojos the researcher practiced at train the same techniques. Each teacher may approach them a little differently, but Ikkyo is always a straight arm lock, and Nikkyo is always a coiled arm and wrist lock. Sankyo is always a straight wrist lock, and Yonkyo, Gokyo and the others never vary in their most basic forms. What is the doctrine of Aikido is how the techniques are arrived at, and how they are applied.

The Ethics of Aikido

The ethics of Aikido reflect the country and culture of Aikido's origin quite clearly. Rather than being hard and fast absolute rules of the "this is sinful, this is good" sort, they are situational. The basic ethic of Aikido is the application of its doctrines in situations outside the dojo, and this is not limited to those occasions when someone is attacking you.

This ethic focuses on universal caring, harmony in relationships, and avoiding confrontations through the application of the principles taught in the physical techniques. In discussions, don't disagree outright. Let your partner overextend his argument, then draw him around to your point of view. By being more aware of people's feelings and attitudes, one can foresee conflicts before they arise, and take steps to defuse or redirect the situation.

If one fails in applying Aikido to a situation, it is not a cause for reprobation, but rather an indication that one needs to continue training, so that one will more fully understand the principles, and be able to apply them more appropriately in the future.

Specific rules are unheard of. This is likely to be because specific rules would not allow the flexibility to deal with all of life's possible situations in a harmonious manner. Inflexibility breeds confrontation and dissent, so specific ethical rules would necessarily cause one to act in a manner contrary to the doctrines of Aikido.

The Social Aspects of Aikido

Aikido is an unavoidably social activity. Even for high-ranking exponents, a partner is required for practice. Practice brings together a group of people on a regular basis, and these people spend the practice in intimate contact with each other. This high degree of physical intimacy, and the required trust that your training partners are not going to injure you, help to foster a sense of camaraderie among the members of a dojo.

This sense of camaraderie is developed into a sense of community in a number of ways. Aikido dojos, unlike many dojos of the more well known Tae Kwon Do, are

rarely business ventures, and even when teaching the martial arts is the instructors' primary means of support, no one has ever gotten rich as an Aikido Sensei. In the course of this research, only one instructor was encountered whose primary source of income was teaching the martial arts, and he had to teach several other martial arts besides Aikido to enable him to make a living at it.

The fact that the vast majority of dojos are not businesses is part of what causes the dojos to develop into strong communities. Every member of a dojo must be mobilized to take care of and maintain the dojo. This holds true whether the dojo has its own permanent building, or the dojo exists in borrowed space only during practices.

In a permanent dojo, the members of the dojo have to do all of the cleaning and maintenance of the dojo, from sweeping the mats before practice, to taking out the garbage, to washing the bathrooms, to fixing the roof when it leaks. Everyone in the dojo helps out with something. Not everyone will do every task, but each member of the dojo is expected to find some way to contribute to the running of the dojo.

At dojos that exist only during practice, and are used for other purposes, the members of the dojo have other tasks to share in. The mats for practice must be put down and taken up before and after every class. If there is a shomen, it too must be assembled and disassembled for every class. In addition there are the arrangements to be made concerning the use of the practice space.

While every dojo has a head instructor, with the exception of the extremely rare dojo that has a professional instructor, the teaching duties are also shared among the students at both permanent and floating dojos. Anyone who has achieved the rank of shodan (first-degree black belt) can expect to be asked to teach occasionally. As one moves up in rank, one can expect to be asked to handle more teaching duties.

All of these shared responsibilities serve to develop a strong sense of community within individual dojos. In addition, the fact that practicing any martial art is a fairly rare phenomenon in the United States adds to the sense of community. What people are doing in Aikido may well seem bizarre to those who do not engage in martial arts. Studying how to fight is not a common thing, and the entertainment media have consistently presented martial artists as unbeatable warriors when compared with non-martial artists. This has created a mystique around all of the martial arts, not just Aikido, and martial artists, while not encouraging this mystique, and often trying to deflate it, at least as frequently enjoy it.

Another point which bears upon many aspects of being a martial artist, is that all martial artists, not just Aikidoists, practice something that is almost impossible to share with those who lack experience with the martial arts. The only people who

understand many of the things one does are other martial artists. This tends to bring the members of a dojo together also. The shared intensity of practice, the shared experiences of being injured and coming back for more, and the simple fact that after a martial artist achieves a degree of confidence in their skill, they no longer react to pressure and aggressive behavior in the same way those without such martial arts training do. This last is a tremendous sense of empowerment. These things also help to create a sense of a unique community.

The above reasons combine to produce a social group. One subject said:

> I'm here. I go to work. I'm here five or six days a week. There's not much outside. This is my social life. And it's very nice, because there are really, really nice people here.
>
> It's like a second home for most of the people that come here. Because of Sensei's sense of family, everybody supports everybody else.

Another said "Although I still like the exercise, I've become friends with the people who do it." Many dojos develop a greater or lesser amount of extra-dojo socializing which only serves to strengthen the dojo as a social unit.

All of these things combine to make martial artists in general, and Aikidoists in particular, feel that they are members of a unique group. This feeling of being different from the average crowd reinforces itself, and is reinforced by non-martial artists who will joke about being intimidated, or the martial artist's ability to "take them apart." Particularly for people who did not perceive themselves as being physically powerful before they started a martial art, this is a heady drug, and serves to strengthen their feelings towards their dojo social group.

The Ritual Aspects of Aikido

Aikido is something that is practiced. This is a point that cannot be made too strongly. There are no statements of belief, no creeds to be recited. While there is a large and rapidly expanding library of books, magazines and videos about Aikido, knowledge of them is not at all necessary to achieve a high rank in Aikido. The only thing required of an Aikido practitioner is, like anyone who wishes to get to Carnegie Hall, practice, practice, practice!

This is the main reason that so many divergent opinions about Aikido can exist side-by-side within one dojo community, much less within the greater Aikido community. Within a dojo, time is devoted to practicing the techniques of Aikido, and little, if any, time is spent talking about Aikido. This leaves little opportunity for differing views on the nature of Aikido to be aired.

Several subjects specifically mentioned the atmosphere of the dojo, and the attitudes of the practitioners as things that either attracted them to Aikido initially, or as things that contribute to their coming back every week to practice. During practice, individuals are expected to be quiet, attentive (this is a combat art; awareness is one of the things being taught), respectful of everyone in the dojo, considerate, caring and protective of their partners.

Like all Japanese martial arts, the practice of Aikido is steeped in ritual. Most of these rituals have survived the journey across the Pacific Ocean quite well. There are rituals for entering and exiting the dojo, opening and closing class, practicing with your partners during class, and some dojos even have rituals to follow when getting training tools such as practice knives and swords.

These rituals provide the boundaries for Aikido practice. The ritual bows when entering or exiting the mat area provide a clear demarcation of dojo space/not dojo space. The rituals for opening and closing the practice sessions clearly demark the time for practice and who is in charge of practice, as well as reminding everyone where Aikido came from. These sorts of rituals are endemic within the Japanese martial arts, and even Judo, which is best known world-wide as a sport, maintains many of these practices. In many of the martial traditions that date to pre-modern Japan, the religious origin of some of these rituals is quite clear, with many bows being made to the dojo kamidana, literally god shelf, that is the altar placed in the dojo shomen.

In Aikido, even the act of warming up becomes a ritual. There are special exercises, called "Aikitaiso" or Aiki exercises, and although every exercise in some way relates to the technical practice of Aikido, some of them have been lifted from Shinto or Buddhist traditions and are traditional esoteric practices (Little, 1994). However, considering how few subjects displayed a deep knowledge of the history of Aikido, it seems unlikely that more than a one or two would know anything about this. Therefore, although some of these exercises may have roots in esoteric Japanese practices, it is the ideas that are connected to them by American practitioners rather than their historical roots that have importance for Aikido practitioners in the United States.

When examining Aikido rituals in a religious context, Spiro's definition of religion will be used as a guide (Spiro 1966, 96). In addition, in order to look at the religious component of some of the ritual behavior involved in Aikido, we will be guided by the system of examining ritual actions outlined in Rethinking Religion (Lawson and McCauley 1990), which also relies on Spiro's definition.

Lawson and McCauley's theory ignores arguments about the truth claims of religion and focuses on the beliefs and actions of particular religions. This method avoids the recriminations involved in too much of academic research. The fears, worries and arguments of those who want to make religious truth something outside of academic research, and those of the academic community who are

trying to show that the physical sciences have made religion obsolete and irrelevant, are both avoided.

The Lawson/McCauley theory of ritual analysis posits that within the rituals of any given system are large quantities of knowledge about the system. This knowledge can be unpacked by examining the necessary components of the ritual. One of their examples is the Catholic ritual of crossing oneself with holy water as one enters the church. By unpacking this ritual they are able to trace its nested knowledge back to Christ establishing the Church. As they demonstrate, the holy water has no power of its own, it is only through the act of a priest blessing ordinary water that it becomes holy. The priest can do this only because he has been empowered by three bishops. The bishops can do this only because they have been empowered by previous bishops of the church. The church exists only because it was established on earth by the power of Christ. Ultimately then, neither the parishioner nor the holy water is doing any blessing. It is the power of Christ that is doing the blessing. All of this knowledge and these rituals are nested within the ritual of a parishioner blessing himself with holy water at the entrance to the church. Lawson and McCauley's theory provides a framework for unpacking any ritual, from any ritual system, to discover the necessary components of the ritual, and what they can teach us about the ritual system.

Lawson and McCauley's theory allows for a clear analysis of ritual action that enables researchers to determine the role of super-human agents within the framework of the religious ritual, and to understand the role of those super-human agents within the cosmology of believers. It traces the structure of rituals by following the necessary precedents for each ritual back to their most immediate connection to super-human agent(s). In this way researchers are able to see where and how the super-human agent or agents have interacted with the world, and something of the role and relationship to the world believers implicitly ascribe to them.

To begin examining Aikido ritual, we first need to know something of its setting. Aikido is most clearly described as a grappling art, which involves throwing people, pinning them and applying joint locks. Because of the force and intensity involved in throwing someone around a room, it is practiced on mats. In Japan, the traditional Japanese floorcovering of thick, woven, rice-straw mats, or tatami is used. In the United States actual tatami are generally unavailable. This being the case, foam mats are usually substituted, with a canvas cover over them to prevent toes from becoming caught in the cracks.

The front of the dojo is designated as shomen, or proper face. While in a few dojos there is little to indicate shomen except the actions of the students, in most there is some sort of special area. In permanent dojos which do not have to share their space with anyone, this special area can be quite ornate, and even in some dojos that consist of borrowed space, with the mats laid out before practice and taken up after, there will be a specially designated shomen. The typical shomen consists

of a picture of Ueshiba Morihei, usually one taken in his later years when he looked much like a grand old patriarch, with little hair and a long, wispy beard. Often there will also be some Japanese calligraphy of the characters for Aikido, or some saying of Ueshiba. Other things that might be present include a bokken (wooden practice sword), tanto (wooden practice dagger), jo (4 foot staff), a flower arrangement, a rin (ritual bell used in Japanese Buddhist altars), or even a real Japanese sword or dagger. One dojo that taught several Japanese martial arts besides Aikido lacked the picture of Ueshiba, but had a complete kamidana, or home Shinto shrine.

The most complex shomen the researcher saw involved a large picture of Ueshiba, calligraphy by the founder of the particular branch of Aikido that the dojo belonged to, a rin bell, and a model tanto in a shirasaya (plain wood storage sheath) all in a small alcove at the front of the dojo. At another dojo that was housed in an athletic club where the dojo members have to put down and take up the mats for every practice, they still managed to have a fairly complex shomen. Their shomen consisted of a portable rice-paper screen that served as the background, with a picture of Ueshiba hung from the screen, a weapon stand that could hold two weapons, and a shelf with an artificial flower arrangement on it. This was put up before every practice and put away after.

The following descriptions are taken from the researcher's personal experience practicing Aikido. They follow the general pattern described in Aikido information for beginners (see Kjartan 1999). They do not represent the limits of possible Aikido rituals to be encountered throughout the world of Aikido. Rather, these are the most commonly encountered forms of the rituals in the researcher's experience, and many of them are endemic to all the Japanese martial arts, not only to Aikido. What can make them unusual in Aikido is the interpretation given to them by Aikido practitioners.

The first ritual encountered in Aikido is found before you even really enter the dojo. As you step onto the mats, you turn towards the shomen and bow to about 45 degrees. This is done whenever you enter or exit the training area of the dojo.

The next ritual is one of the major, regular, ritual activities of Aikido. This is the formal bowing-in that opens any Aikido practice. The students all line up kneeling, facing the shomen, and the sensei kneels in front of the students facing the shomen. At the command, which varies in complexity from dojo to dojo, but is essentially the word "Rei!" meaning "bow" in Japanese, everyone bows towards the shomen. The sensei then turns to face the students and again following the command to bow, the students bow to sensei and sensei bows in recognition of the students respect.

At the end of practice, this ritual is performed in reverse. It is generally followed by the students individually bowing to each other, though this activity shows a great deal of variation. In some dojos the bowing to other students proceeds in a

very formal manner, with everyone forming two lines and rotating through the lines so that everyone bows to everyone else. In other dojos it is a more haphazard affair, with everyone milling about bowing to each other.

The most important ritual by far, is simply the practice itself. The philosophy and worldview of Aikido is not taught with books or with words. It is taught through the regular practice of the techniques. It is this ritualized practice of the techniques that teaches the concepts of harmony and loving-protection, as well as teaching effective methods for breaking wrists and arms, and for throwing people around a room.

The technical syllabus of Aikido is not unique. All of the techniques taught in Aikido can be found in various other Japanese martial arts. The unique content of Aikido practice is the way the techniques are arrived at and applied. Pure force is avoided. Techniques such as wrist-locks and throws are accomplished by carefully blending and harmonizing with the attackers movement and then redirecting that movement. Techniques are to be done to the point of control, not to the point of damaging someone.

Whatever technique is being practiced, it will emphasize and illustrate many of the doctrines of Aikido. One of the most basic points is harmonize, don't fight with someone. Whatever uke's attack, shite begins by getting out of the way of the attack (called "getting off the line" of the attack) and then finding a way to use the attack's energy to defeat itself. Shite then redirects uke's energy by either going inside the effective range of the attack, or taking uke's momentum and drawing uke beyond their range of self-control, and finally applying one of the techniques of Aikido to bring uke to the ground and maintain control of uke there.

It is here that the doctrines of Aikido are illustrated, demonstrated, and practiced. They are not talked about much. The emphasis is on the application and use of principles of Aikido. It is in this practice that the real doctrines of Aikido are learned, and it is this practice that makes up the core of Aikido. "It's almost a religion but there's nothing talked about" is how one subject put it. This statement reflects the tradition of creeds and asserted belief in American churches. Since Aikido lacks these things, most practitioners do not perceive it as being religious.

Practice follows the traditional model of Japan. The teacher demonstrates a technique a few times, and perhaps makes a couple of brief comments about points to watch out for, and then the students pair off and practice the technique on their own. The teacher will then move about the room quietly helping individuals with their practice. This will continue until sensei claps his hands, signaling everyone to line up, at which point the teacher will demonstrate a particular point about the previous technique, or move on and demonstrate a new technique to be practiced. There are very few questions asked, although these are not forbidden. The emphasis is on trying to imitate what the teacher has

done, and discovering the principles underlying the techniques on one's own.

This is the traditional, and still common, teaching model in Japan. This has been the model for learning in Japan for centuries, and continues to be the model for teaching any physical activity, whether it is traditional arts such as Iaido or Kado, or modern sports like Kendo or basketball. The teacher models, and the students seek to gain insight into the technique through imitating the teacher.

The ritual of practice is the core of Aikido, and it is this practice that makes Aikido a living way. By practicing the techniques in the prescribed way, students of Aikido learn the principles of blending and non-confrontation. It is axiomatic in Aikido circles that there are an infinite number of variations on the basic techniques of Aikido. The goal of the technical practice is to internalize the principles so that one applies them without thought in all areas of life. Ideally, the principles are to be so natural that they are like breathing, one doesn't think about doing it, one isn't even aware that one is doing it, but one can't live without doing it. That is the ideal state of development for a student of Aikido. Without any awareness of them at all, she continuously applies the principles of Aikido to her life.

Looking at the above rituals using Lawson and McCauley's theory, it is possible to determine how these rituals might be religious. Looked at individually, none of them appears to be religious. When looked at in the context of what many of the research subjects have said, however, the religious nature can be made clear. The religious nature of Aikido is not very explicit. It is often subtle, and it never has the stridency sometimes associated, for example, with Christianity or Islam.

To find the religious within Aikido, the ritual of regular practice will be examined. As described above, regular practice is lead by a teacher, or sensei, who demonstrates the techniques to be practiced and gives instruction in them. To hold an Aikido practice, a qualified teacher must be present. This teacher leads the class through the opening bowing ceremony, any warm-up exercises, and then instructs the class in the techniques for that practice.

The necessary component for an Aikido practice is a qualified teacher. A person becomes a qualified teacher by training in Aikido under a qualified teacher. When a student has demonstrated sufficient mastery of the techniques and philosophy of Aikido, the teacher will indicate that the student is now capable of teaching on his or her own. In practice, the rank of shodan (black belt) is generally seen as being proof of sufficient mastery to teach a class if no higher ranking teacher is available.

It does not follow from this that students who are recognized as being able to teach will immediately go out and open their own dojos. Many students remain in their teacher's dojo and never start their own dojo. However, these students will often be asked to teach classes when their teacher is not available.

This naturally leads to the question of where qualified teachers originate from. All qualified teachers of Aikido must be able to trace their lineage back to one of Ueshiba's direct students, and thus to Ueshiba himself. Ueshiba personally licensed his original students, and since the founding of the Aikikai and the Yoshinkai, these organizations have awarded ranks and teaching licenses.9 All subsequent splits within Aikido have been by ranking teachers leaving an organization and taking their students with them to found a new organization. Therefore, the teaching lineage from Ueshiba to the present remains unbroken even when Aikido students are two or three or more organizations removed from Ueshiba's organization, the Aikikai, or even when they do not belong to any organization because their teacher no longer belongs to an organization for political reasons.

As shown in Chapters II and III, Ueshiba did not take credit for the creation of Aikido, but rather attributed the creation of Aikido to the inspiration of kami. Ueshiba's various mystical experiences, including his experience under fire while accompanying Deguchi and his enlightenment in his garden, together with his insistence that the creation of Aikido was due to the guidance of the kami and represents the fundamental laws of the Universe point to the foundational rituals of Aikido. The kami created Aikido, using Ueshiba as a chosen agent to propagate Aikido on earth.

At this point the religious nature of Aikido ritual, and Aikido itself, becomes clear. To practice Aikido it is necessary to have a teacher who can trace his lineage back to Ueshiba, and through Ueshiba to the kami. Therefore, the lessons of harmony, blending , loving protection and the particular techniques which comprise Aikido are the lessons of the kami.

This makes Aikido a religious activity for those practitioners who believe Ueshiba was divinely inspired. This is true whether they accept the traditional teachings of Aikido basically as they are, or if they interpret them through another religious tradition. If they accept the teachings as is, nothing further is needed. If they interpret the teachings through another religious tradition, Christianity or Islam for example, all that is necessary is to treat the ambiguous "kami" as meaning "God," "Jesus," "Allah," or whatever deity they believe in. If this is done, then the rest of the teachings of Aikido fit into their new religious surroundings with little difficulty.

Among the interview subjects, there was no indication that any of the general rituals of Aikido, such as the opening and closing bowing rituals, granted any benefits beyond those gained from regular practice. The benefits of Aikido were not a product of the particular rituals associated with practice, but as flowing from regular practice and training in Aikido.

The practice of Aikido is exactly that. Practice. The techniques of Aikido are practiced and practiced, endlessly. No one is beyond practicing. Even Ueshiba is

reported to have said shortly before his death "This old man must still practice, practice." This sets Aikido apart from much of religion in the United States. All of Aikido in encompassed within its physical practice.

Aikido in Life

Aikido is not limited to its techniques for dealing with physical confrontations. As one subject said while talking about why she does Aikido, "I do Aikido because I like what it says. I like what it does. And I like that, if it's really part of you, you can't help but let it carry over to everyday life."

Within Aikido, this is known as "taking Aikido off the mat." It is the application of the principles and teachings of Aikido outside of their literal context of physical combat. In fact Aikido Today Magazine has a regular column called "Off The Mat" which deals exclusively with applying Aikido principles to non-combat situations outside the dojo. Many of the interview subjects specifically mentioned that one way they felt they had benefited from studying Aikido was in social situations outside the dojo. They had learned to apply Aikido in their social relationships to avoid and resolve conflicts. Steven Andress addresses this point in his thesis, Understanding Ki in the Daily Experience of Advanced Practitioners of Aikido (Andress 1996). These interviews show a strong emphasis on the part of individuals in applying Aikido teachings to non-combat situations.

Several of my informants, who talked about applying Aikido as spiritual and mental discipline, also described applying some of Aikido's basic teachings at a physical level in their everyday life.

There are times when you're just turning a bolt on a wrench and I find myself at arm's length to the job. I think "Well, am I in my range of effectiveness?" and I pull in and it's easier to work because I've found the proper distance. In Aikido, in an attack that might be considered the maai. And it's the same principle there. I'm in my range when I can naturally turn the wrench. I'm out of it when I'm extended.

Many of the informants made Aikido active in all parts of their lives, not just within the dojo. Another informant said, "I look at Aikido as a way of life. But I think that the whole idea, for me it's a way of living. It's a way of life." He also gives as an application of Aikido in a social situation.

I practice Aikido every single day of my life. I'm in sales, and it's been the greatest thing for my sales. It has been. The idea of, if I've had a lot of unhappy customers, a lot of rejections, whatever it might be, and for me, that's an attack. And to be able to take this energy, and redirect it to a more neutral position, so it ends up in a win-win scenario, that's Aikido. That's the best Aikido.

This is an example of Aikido off the mat. The subject has taken Aikido principles specifically intended for use in combat situations, and applied them to his job as

a salesman. This sort of application of Aikido outside the dojo is very common, particularly among those subjects who see Aikido as a form a spiritual and/or philosophical practice.

This is one of the most important attractions for the people who consider Aikido a spiritual or philosophical practice, that Aikido is not just a martial art, but a way of approaching every aspect of their lives. In many cases this outweighs all of Aikido's other facets. One subject, in response to the question, "Have your reasons for studying Aikido changed since you started?" even went so far as to say, "The self-defense aspect has basically totally been eliminated. I don't think I could defend myself now. It's pretty much strictly the philosophy."

This is an individual who started because he was interested in self-defense. The martial aspects of Aikido for this subject have come to serve strictly as a means of learning and practicing its philosophy. The idea of Aikido as martial art intended to be effective in real combat has been completely overwhelmed by its philosophy.

There is one other aspect of Aikido that needs to be mentioned, and that is reigi, which translates as courtesy, but includes a very strong dose of etiquette as well. American culture does not spend much time on etiquette, and in recent years it has become common to hear media pundits lament the lack of manners among Americans. The rituals of Aikido teach students to be polite and mannerly by giving them a clear set of rules and actions to follow for nearly every situation in the dojo. Always bow to your partner(s) before you begin practicing a technique with them. Always bow to them when you are done, and express your thanks to them for practicing with you. Always bow to the teacher when he approaches you to give instruction, and always bow and say thank you when he is done.

Practitioners often find themselves using variations of these courtesies outside the dojo. The values of politeness and consideration which are enforced in the dojo become internalized by the practitioners and are then expressed outside the dojo. Several subjects remarked on this point during the course of their interviews.

It seems likely that Aikido's basic tenet of harmony is appealing because it meshes very nicely with a trend in modern America to emphasize harmony; live in harmony with the world around you, don't just take what you want from the world without thought. Ueshiba's teachings about harmony preceded the environmental movement in the United States and Europe by several decades, yet they form an almost perfect fit with popular environmental thinking. Aikido thus reflects in a very physical way many ideas about harmony that can be heard in modern American society. The application of Aikido's teachings about harmony in the practitioner's social life is then a logical extension of the emphasis upon harmony.

Is Aikido a Form of Religious Practice for Americans?

Aikido has many aspects associated with religion. It has a rich collection of rituals, specially designated and decorated areas for practicing those rituals, highly trained leaders to conduct its rituals, a non-verbal doctrine, and an ethical standard. For many, this might be sufficient to designate Aikido as religious.

However, for purposes of this study these features are insufficient for declaring Aikido to be religious in nature. For Aikido to be religious, it must meet Spiro's definition of religion. For Spiro, religion is "an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings" (Spiro 1966, 96).

Using this definition, the subjects were divided into three groups based on their beliefs about Aikido. The first group consists of those subjects for whom Aikido is completely non-religious. For these subjects it is solely a physical and philosophical activity that has no connection to God, religion or super-human agents of any sort.

The second group is made up of subjects for whom Aikido is a form of religions practice, but one that is contained within, and seen through the lens of their primary religious tradition. Thus Ueshiba may be seen as having been divinely inspired, but the divinity who inspired him is clearly seen as being the Christian or Moslem God. These subjects rejected any other possible interpretations because they are incompatible with the their core religious beliefs.

The third group consists of subjects who more or less accept the religious teachings of Aikido as they are found in the writings about Aikido. "More or less" because the members of this group insist on their right to question and interpret everything for themselves, so that while they generally accepted the religious teachings of Aikido, they did so on their own terms. No member of this group saw Aikido as the sole truth. It was seen instead as one path among many, the most appropriate path for these individuals.

The eleven subjects in the first group, are diverse, being held together by one thing. Aikido is not a religious practice for any of them. These individuals practice Aikido for a variety of reasons, ranging from self-defense to philosophy to personal improvement.

Religiously, they have very little in common. Some are hard-core atheists, one is a devout Catholic, another is a Reformed Jew, and one claimed not to have an opinion on anything religious. One was expressly on a spiritual quest for "inner peace," but did not see Aikido as religious.

For most of this group, their attitude towards the sacred narratives of Aikido is an extension of their primary religious beliefs. For the atheist, there was no place for divine inspiration in his worldview. For the Catholics and the Reformed Jew, their

religious beliefs did not leave room for Ueshiba to have been divinely inspired.

There were also a number who seemed to have given up religion without embracing atheism. For these individuals, all of whom were raised Catholic, religion seemed to be a subject that they did not wish to expend any time on. Though they no longer held to the Catholicism that they were raised in, they had not replaced it with anything, and did not appear to be looking for something to replace it with.

When they were asked if they thought Ueshiba had been divinely inspired when he created Aikido, everyone in this group said "No." Several of the subjects then proceeded to explain that they believed he had come to create Aikido by combining his experience in various martial arts to create a new one.

They also gave a variety of explanations for the abilities attributed to Ueshiba in the narratives about his life. These ranged from one individual who thought that Ueshiba was simply a naturally gifted individual, to others who attributed his abilities to a deep sensitivity to ki, to others who felt that such abilities were the goal of Aikido practice, and by implication, that with sufficient training anyone should be able to develop similar abilities.

For eight of the subjects, Aikido was a religious practice. However, rather than it being a self-contained religion for these subjects, it was subsumed by the subjects' primary religious faith.10 These subjects viewed the practice of Aikido, Ueshiba, and the sacred narratives of Aikido through the paradigm of their traditional religious practice.

This group included representatives of Catholicism, Islam, the Methodist and Lutheran Churches, and non-denominational Christians. Their individual opinions about the ideas in the sacred narratives, i.e., that Ueshiba was divinely inspired and/or enlightened, that he had super-human perceptions, and whether or not Aikido is a form of religious practice, varied from acceptance to disbelief on each point. When the subject's interviews were examined as a whole however, it became clear that these individuals had each, in different ways, incorporated Aikido into their religious worldview.

For some, this was simply a matter of accepting as given that Ueshiba had been divinely inspired by the super-human agent of their own tradition when he created Aikido, without seeing Aikido as being a direct form of religious practice. Others allow for the possibility of Ueshiba having been divinely inspired, without holding an opinion one way or the other, while viewing their own Aikido practice as way of actively practicing the principles of their religion.

These subjects all came to Aikido with strongly held religious beliefs, and incorporated Aikido into their core religious system. They accepted those parts of the sacred narratives of Aikido that did not conflict with their core system, while

modifying and/or rejecting those portions that did. For some, this meant that Ueshiba was divinely inspired, but that the practice of Aikido itself was not a religious activity. For others, Aikido was a religious practice, but they could not be sure about Ueshiba having been divinely inspired.

All of these subjects, however, connected Aikido with super-human agents in one way or another. Many of the subjects would be very surprised to have their Aikido described as religious. This is because in their conception, religion is a complete entity, needing and accepting nothing from outside itself. Here though, traditional religious practice is augmented with the practice of Aikido, which is seen as embodying many of the teachings of the traditional group.

The third group consists of 10 subjects who accepted the sacred narratives of Aikido generally as they are given. They believe Ueshiba was inspired, that he had super-human capabilities, and the clear majority of them said that Aikido was a religious practice.

This does not mean that they accepted the sacred narratives of Aikido uncritically. It also does not mean that they are "converts" to Aikido. On top of their general belief in the sacred narratives of Aikido and treating Aikido as a religious practice, this group has one other thing in common. They are all spiritual "seekers," critically searching for their own answers about the relationship between themselves, the universe, and whatever super-human agents there may be. All but two of these subjects were raised in Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, and those two did not have any religious training in their youth.

At the time of the interviews, however, not one member of this group considered themselves a part of a religious community. Although only one member of the group was explicit about shopping around any religious tradition he could find, all of these subjects were actively building their own cosmology. They share a deep suspicion of organized religion in general, and in fact there was a tendency to perceive "religion" as meaning an organized group with a dogma and a professional clergy. This was contrasted with "spiritual," which indicated any sort of religious practice or search undertaken outside the auspices of organized religion.

This group includes both people who are reasonably satisfied with the religious answers they have arrived at and individuals who are still actively looking. The doctrines of Aikido provide a common ground for this group. This ground was bounded by the goals of achieving personal harmony with the universe, universal harmony, and continual self-cultivation. Traditional American ideas about sin and salvation were noticeably absent from their comments. As one subject put it, "They're not setting you up and saying, 'Hey, if you do this, this makes you good. And if you do this, that's bad.' It's a general, overall, consuming philosophy, that just begins to underlie everything, and creep into everything."

What was evident was a clear focus on this world. Unlike some members of the second group, who subsumed Aikido within their traditional religious practice and wondered about whether or not Ueshiba was in heaven, this group did not display any interest in any kind of afterlife. Their focus was entirely on how they should live in this world.

It really is a way of life, and being down here on the mat is something that I do because I enjoy it. But that doesn't mean that I'm not doing it when I'm not down here teaching or taking the class.

The subject's this-world focus is well matched by the narratives about Ueshiba and Ueshiba's own writings. Ueshiba's this-worldly focus is clearly within the tradition of Japanese religion, where even Buddhism's primary role is to take care of the ancestors so they will protect and aid the family. With nearly a third of all the interview subjects' religious ideas focused on this-worldly development rather than other-worldly salvation, this might suggests a possible trend of change in Americans' religious thinking, from a focus on other-worldly salvation to one of this-worldly development.

While most of these subjects believed Ueshiba had been divinely inspired, their image of the divine was very imprecise. This was not because of a lack of thought on the subjects' parts. One member of this group has a Master's degree in comparative religion, all of them are very articulate, and many were clearly quite well read. Several of these subjects specifically quoted the first chapter of the Tao Te Ching when trying to explain their beliefs, saying "The Tao that can be named is not the real Tao . . ." Among the members of this group, who were distributed among the various dojos, there was a strong sense that human conceptions of the divine, and human explanations of the universe, would always be incomplete and inadequate, because humans are limited while the universe, and the divine are not. Aikido was seen as one way of expanding their understanding of the Universe. Many subjects were engaged in spiritual paths other than Aikido as well. Some practiced qi qong, and several forms of meditation practice were represented, and one subject was engaged in correspondence study through The College of Tao.

In no case was Aikido seen as being the sole universal truth. Quite the opposite. Aikido was seen as being one path among many, and as seen above, it is quite possible and acceptable for individuals to tread more than one path simultaneously. There is an old Japanese saying that several of the interview subjects used, "There are many different paths to the top of the mountain, but they all lead to the same place."

This attitude was evident in every dojo I visited in regards to people studying martial arts besides Aikido, and for the subjects in this group, it was also their attitude towards religion. As one subject put it,

It also fits in with what I learned growing up in the church, which I am comfortable with, as long as I'm allowed to question and interpret. It's not that I don't think anyone should go to church. If you need it, you need it.

This is a good example of the feelings found among this group. "As long as I'm allowed to question and interpret" sums up this group's attitudes towards religion of any sort. This was accompanied by a feeling that within organized religion one is not allowed to question and interpret.

This flexibility and openness to multiple traditions is an important factor in the subjects' dedication to Aikido. Although Aikido is their way, it does not require them to stop looking for other ways. As several members of this group did, it is entirely acceptable to practice other martial arts, and other religious traditions simultaneously with Aikido. These people are not interested in having answers given to them. They insist on working things out for themselves, and closely analyzing any answers they do get, even the ones they find for themselves.

Three subjects didn't fit into the above groups. One is an active Catholic, the others described themselves as a "lapsed" Catholic and a "non-practicing" Catholic.

The active Catholic had problems with the idea of Aikido as a divinely inspired creation, but would not deny that as a possibility. This individual genuinely appreciated the teachings of Aikido, and applies them to his spiritual life outside the dojo, in much the same way people apply lessons from psychology to their everyday lives.

The other two respondents were even more imprecise. When asked about Ueshiba and divine inspiration, one said "In his own way, yes. I believe in some inspiration." This was the only religious connection to Aikido for this individual. The other case had some strong connections to Aikido, but did not find definitions of God as a separate entity acceptable. This made it difficult to clearly categorize this interview as well.

Summary

Breaking the subjects down into the above groups for analysis is efficient for looking at some of the strains of thought and belief within Aikido, and their relationship to one another. It shows quite clearly how extremely different, even contradictory, opinions and beliefs about Aikido manage to exist harmoniously within the same dojo.11

However, the above divisions arbitrarily obscure a much greater unity between two of the groups. The individuals for whom Aikido is a religious practice interpreted through their core tradition, and those for whom it is taken basically as presented, are creating their own religious worlds. They are actively choosing which spiritual/religious questions they are interested in.

Just how active becomes clear when the members of each group are looked at by their movement from their religious background. There was very little movement between religious groups among those individuals in the group where Aikido was not a religious practice. Out of eleven subjects, five were still part of the same tradition, four were atheists or didn't seem to bother with religion at all, and two identified their current religious status by what it no longer was: Catholic.

In contrast, in the group for whom Aikido was clearly a religious practice, not one subject was still a member of the group named as their religious background. In fact, none of them were really connected to any organized religion, though many of them had experimented with a variety of religious practices. Although several of these subjects identified a formal religious affiliation, it was a formal affiliation, done for form's sake because other members of their families were committed to that particular church.

The middle group, in which Aikido was a religious practice under another tradition, as might be expected, was somewhere in between the others. Out of eight subjects in the group, four remained in the tradition of their background, three were not affiliated/not practicing (this last meaning "Not practicing Catholic), and one was a member of a very different church. Whereas in the first group most subjects either remained in the same tradition or rejected religion in general, and the last group gave up on organized religion all together, the middle group took a middle path. Five of them stayed with an organized church, but all have personal religious vision broad enough to include practicing Aikido as an expression of their religion.

Examining the subjects from this angle allows them to be separated into only two groups. The first group is made up of those subjects for whom Aikido is not a religious practice. The second group is made up of those for whom Aikido is a religious practice. What is interesting about these groups is not their beliefs about Aikido but rather their actions where religion is concerned.

The first group is comfortable with the religion they were raised in, or they have no religion at all, either through actively rejecting it or passively not bothering with it. Those who are still active within organized religion are comfortable within their church, and those who are not active, are not looking for anything to replace the churches they have left.

Looked at against the backdrop provided by this group, the second group leaps into perspective. Most of its members have either rejected organized religion altogether and replaced it with individual quests, or they have remained within an organized religious structure, but choose to bring at least one outside element into their own practice. Simply put, all of them are engaged in religion as a personal activity, rather than as a social activity. All of them, those outside of organized religion as well as those within it, are practicing religion that they construct themselves, whether or not organized religion is a part of that

construction. Ueno (1995, 295) even found an active member of the Jesuit Order who had included Aikido in his regular religious life.

>From this it is clear that some Americans are seeking and finding more ways of expressing and practicing their religious beliefs than just those presented within organized religion. For some this means abandoning organized religion altogether, while for others it means finding ways of augmenting their organized religious practice with outside practices. This is markedly different from the traditional American paradigm which produced groups such as the Shaker who rejected any outside influence.

This willingness to look outside organized religion may or may not be a new factor in American religion. Probably it is not. The popularity of Asian religious teachings started with the Transcendentalists and the Theosophical Society, and continued with the few Asian teachers who were able to enter the United States between the 1860s and the 1960s. This suggests that an unmet demand for religious ideas and practices had long existed in the United States. Once immigration restrictions were eased in the 1960s, the seeming explosive popularity of the new religious alternatives suggests that this demand was now being met. The sudden popularity of these many options is sudden only in that options were now readily available.

Aikido is merely one of those options, and one of the quieter ones at that. It makes room for nearly everyone who is interested in any portion of it. It is easier for people belonging to a wide variety of traditions to practice than anything that is overtly religious because it does not make statements of belief any sort of requirement. The only thing required of a member of an Aikido dojo is that of practice. This allows numerous beliefs about religion and Aikido to coexist harmoniously within a single dojo, without anyone needing to feel even slightly hypocritical, since no one is required to express any beliefs during Aikido practice.

As this research shows, Aikido dojos accommodate a surprisingly broad spectrum of views on Aikido quite peaceably. Individuals are welcome whatever their religious background and affiliation. As seen from the interviews, practitioners can focus on any aspects of Aikido they wish to, from the purely martial to the purely philosophical to the religious. A clear majority of these practitioners have interwoven aspects of Aikido into their religious lives, whether as one strain of an already established religious practice, or as part of a religious practice they are creating for themselves.

Chapter V

Conclusion

I have sought to address two questions. The first question was simply, Is Aikido a form of religious practice for its American practitioners? This was a straightforward question. The second was more complex. If Aikido is a form of religious practice for its practitioners, how does it fit into their religious framework? Is it subsumed within another, more traditional religious tradition, such as Christianity, or are traditional Western religious traditions rejected and simply replaced with a new religious framework?

In order to fully understand how a system of combat could also be form of religious practice, Chapters II and III looked the background of Aikido. Chapter II looked at the life of Ueshiba Morihei and the history of Aikido. Chapter III examined the writings of Ueshiba and some of the more prominent exponents of Aikido in the United States.

An examination of the life and writings of the Ueshiba Morihei shows that he clearly saw Aikido as an expression of his religious beliefs. Ueshiba's life was dedicated to religious searching until he joined Oomoto-kyo. As a young man, Ueshiba would disappear for days into the mountains around his home to swing his sword and practice traditional Japanese mountain ascetics. When he was living in

Hokkaido he would perform mizugori daily, regardless of the temperature. When he joined Oomoto-kyo, he threw himself into it completely. He practiced the simple farming methods of the group, and since practicing the arts is held to be a prime means of manifesting the divine in Oomoto-kyo, he took up composing poems and calligraphy.

When Ueshiba eventually decided to leave the Oomoto-kyo headquarters in Ayabe, the founder Onisaburo Deguchi is said to have told him that "Budo will be your yusai, a practice to manifest the divine" (Stevens 1987, 37). Indeed, Ueshiba repeatedly wrote that Aikido was not his creation, but a gift from the kami and that he was merely teaching what the kami had shown him. Further, he wrote "Aikido embraces all and purifies everything" (Ueshiba 1993, 99). As for purification practices, or misogi, in which he clearly included Aikido, he wrote "In misogi one returns to the very beginning, where there is no differentiation between oneself and the universe" (Ueshiba 1993, 90).

The religious nature of Aikido is upheld in the writings of leading exponents of Aikido in America. If anything, the writings of Ueshiba's student Mitsugi Saotome are even clearer in their religiousness. He writes "It was born through the order of Kami that I only followed and conveyed to others. Aiki is the Way of Kami" (Saotome 1993, 15). It would be difficult to find a more direct statement of the religious nature of Aikido. His book, Aikido and the Harmony of Nature, is devoted to demonstrating and explicating the spiritual and religious significance of the teachings of Ueshiba and Aikido.

While Saotome's writings support Aikido as religious practice, John Stevens' biography shows Ueshiba as both divinely inspired and as divinely empowered. Stevens goes so far as to say that "Morihei could even dodge bullets" (1987, 35). Stevens recounts a number of stories that portray Ueshiba as a kind of divinely empowered super-man, able to know other's intentions and defeat any foe.

The interviews contained in Aikido in America (Stone and Meyer 1995) show Ueshiba from the perspective of a number of his personal American students, including Terry Dobson, Robert Nadeau and Mary Heiny, as well as many prominent American teachers who never had the opportunity to train under Ueshiba. Each of the interviews presents a slightly different look at Ueshiba and Aikido. However, nearly all of the interviews focus on Aikido as a means of personal and spiritual development. The interviews show how well the spiritual teachings of Aikido have been adopted by leading American practitioners of Aikido.

Aikido, like most Japanese martial arts, is practiced in the context of a number of important rituals. These rituals serve to define Aikido in relationship to the rest of world, and to reinforce the traditions and beliefs of Aikido practitioners. The rituals performed at the beginning and closing of each practice remind everyone of their place in the lineage of Aikido. For those who believe that Ueshiba was divinely inspired, the series of bows to shomen and instructor serve to reinforce this knowledge. Everyone, including the teacher, bows to shomen to show respect and honor for Ueshiba, Aikido's founder. Then everyone bows to the teacher, who must be able to trace the lineage of his teachers directly to Ueshiba, who was inspired by kami.

This ritual organizes and reinforces the essential religious elements of Aikido for practitioners at every practice. It also serves the critical purpose of defining the space and time when it is appropriate to practice and transmit the fundamental lessons of Aikido. These lessons, about the fundamental harmony of all things, and how one can live and prosper by in harmony with all things, are taught through the practice of dangerous and highly effective combat techniques. By demarking the period of practice so clearly, the importance of the lessons, both the technical and the deeper lessons, are emphasized.

It may be noted that many, if not all religions, offer adherents power of one sort or another, whether it be power over the temporal world, or the power to transcend the temporal world. Aikido offers both kinds of power. The first sort of power is the same one that can be gained through training in any system of combat. It is the sheer physical power to defeat another human being in battle. This is a tremendous power, and its attraction should not be minimized, especially if it is remembered that out of 33 interview subjects, 19 started Aikido because (a) they were either already proficient martial artists who wanted to expand their range of skills, (b) they were generally interested in martial arts, or (c) they wanted to learn to defend themselves. This is also the primary attraction for most other popular

martial arts, such as karate and Tae Kwon Do, which do not emphasize spiritual lessons as Aikido does.

The spiritual lessons of Aikido offer the power to transcend the ordinary world. These lessons of harmony and oneness with the world offer a way to achieve oneness with kami and the universe. Aikido is also a form of misogi that will purify the practitioner and help him achieve oneness with God and the universe. This is the principal spiritual teaching of Aikido. Importantly, Aikido does not specify anything about the kami, leaving the details up to its individual practitioners.

It is likely that the ambiguity concerning the nature and identity of the kami is an essential part of why Aikido has been successful in expanding outside of Japan. The fact that practitioners can tailor the particulars of Aikido to suit their particular world-view and that Aikido requires no statements of belief are undoubtedly the main reasons that Aikido is practiced by such diverse population without incident. Even within the small sample interviewed, there were atheists, Catholics, Evangelicals, a Moslem, a Jew, and members without a particular religious affiliation.

For two-thirds of all subjects, Aikido was a religious practice. The high percentage for whom Aikido was a form of religious practice was surprising because many of these people were strongly affiliated with established religions. In fact, half of these subjects identified themselves as either members of a particular religious organization, or as unaffiliated Christians (the one Moslem was also a member of this group). These individuals were able to interpret the teachings of Aikido, as well as those of their primary religious affiliation as being mutually supporting, rather than as contradicting each other.

The other half of the subjects for whom Aikido was a religious practice were no longer affiliated with any religious organization. In fact, no member of this group even identified themselves with an established religious tradition. There was a general feeling within this group that genuine religiosity and religious organizations are mutually exclusive. These individuals did not like organized religious groups, and felt that religious dogmas obstruct one's search for true religious understanding. Several of them stated they felt that each person must find the truth for themselves, rather than simply accepting what others said was the truth.

Many members of this group were actively developing their own cosmologies and sets of religious practices. Taking something of a supermarket approach to religious ideas and practices, these individuals had investigated numerous religious traditions, including various Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist groups, practices and literature. Taoist works, particularly the Tao Te Ching, were very popular with this group, several of whom quoted from it during their interview.

It seems likely that these two groups represent a trend in American religious participation and activity. Since the repeal of the Asian Exclusion Act in 1965, the United States has seen an explosion of non-Western traditions within its borders. While much of this has been within the immigrant communities, these activities are experiencing growing popularity among mainstream Americans as well. Practices such as Tai Chi Chuan and Hatha Yoga are recommended by the professional medical community for their health benefits.12 Such things bring even people who initially have no interest in non-traditional forms of spiritual practice not only into contact with them, but also get them practicing them.

In contrast with Christianity, none of the major Asian traditions contain exclusivist statements of faith such as the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds of Christianity. This has allowed the various traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, and Ancestor Worship to co-exist peacefully in Asia. In fact, these traditions have long histories of not only existing side-by-side, but of sharing worshippers and exchanging ideas, rites and space. The most vivid example of this is the common practice in Japan wherein most Shinto shrines have associated Buddhist temples, and most Buddhist temples, even those serving small communities, actually have Shinto deities enshrined within their precincts. These traditions bring with them their traditions of tolerating a variety of views and practices.

In addition, the inability of major American religious organizations to effectively sanction members who hold or advocate unorthodox beliefs and practices changes the background for worship even in the Catholic Church. I suspect that in the future, the trend will be towards accommodating more and more diversity of belief and practice by the traditional religious organizations. With American society becoming more and more ethnically pluralistic, it will unavoidably become religiously pluralistic as well.

In this light, some of the ideas that have been proposed in the study of Asian religions may be of service when examining new trends in American religious belief and practice. Byron Earhart's work on Japanese New Religions seems especially suited to this. His discussions of how the various major religions of Japan co-exist and co-operate in Japanese Religion: Unity and Diversity (1982) is an excellent starting point for anyone unfamiliar with the ways in which Asian traditions interact. In addition, his masterful study of the Japanese New Religion Gedatsu-kai provides an excellent theoretical framework for analyzing the formation and development of New Religious Movements in any culture.

Aikido is one very small thread of the grand tapestry of American religion. It is hoped that this study will stimulate awareness of the religious practices of Americans outside the walls of their churches, synagogues and mosques. I believe that this is where American religion will see it greatest growth in the near future, and that research in this area will provide scholars with new insights into the nature of religion in America.

Appendix A

Interview Script

Interview Script

April 13, 1997

Peter Boylan
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1. How old are you?

2. Sex?

3. How long have you studied Aikido?

4. What is your rank in Aikido?

5. What style or styles of Aikido do you study?

6. Do you study any other martial arts?

7. How long have you studied them? What is your rank in them?

8. What is your religious background?

9. Why did you begin studying Aikido?

10. Have your reasons for studying Aikido changed since you began? Why, and What are they now?

11. How do the practices of Aikido relate to your spiritual practices outside the dojo?

12. Is there anything from Aikido that you regularly practice outside the dojo?

13. The practices of Aikido were laid down by the founder, Ueshiba Morihei. What do you think of him?

14. Do you believe, as is often recounted by his biographers, that he knew others intentions, particularly regarding possible attack?

15. Do believe that he was divinely inspired to create Aikido?

16. Is your Aikido practice a way for you to grow closer to God?

17. Is Aikido practice a way for you to internalize spiritual/religious lessons?

18. What religious lessons do you internalize through Aikido practice?

19. What is misogi?

20. How does misogi help you?

21. What does ki mean to you?

22. What exercises do you do to develop ki?

23. What benefits do you gain from these exercises?

24. Is there anything you might like to add which we have not discussed?

Thank you very much for your assistance and patience.

Appendix B

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Letter of Approval

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Footnotes

1. For the most part, Judo's spiritual emphasis has been replaced by a sporting emphasis. Most people in the world today who say they do Judo, do not practice traditional Kodokan Judo, but rather practice what I refer to as Olympic Judo. Olympic Judo is a competitive sport form of Judo represented in the Olympics. It is said to be the second most popular sport in the world, after soccer, although I have seen no documentation of this. The substitution of a sporting ethos for the traditional spiritual ethos is also visible in many modern karate styles whenever competitive tournaments become popular.

2. There are a number of extent martial systems which trace their lineage back

to the Kashima and Katori Shrines. Part of the problem is that as students of a particular teacher achieved mastery, they would often leave and eventually establish a school of their own, though maintaining the lineage. The only good source dealing with this subject in English is Karl Friday's Legacies of the Sword: the Kashima Shinryu and Samurai Martial Culture, University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

3. Kokoro is a native Japanese term with no single English equivalent. It means heart, mind and spirit all at once, without the separate ideas implied by the English terms. If one considers one faculty which encompasses heart, mind and spirit, a rough approximation of kokoro emerges.

4. Kotodama has roots that are undoubtedly older than the written history of Japan, since it is mentioned in the earliest written Japanese book, the Manyosho. The basic belief is similar to the Indian system of essential sounds, such as aum. The fundamental belief is that certain sounds are basic to the universe, and that they are the essence of all things.

5. Chie Nakane's 1971 book, Japanese Society, has an excellent discussion of this on pages 42-66.

6. O-sensei is an honorific title given to Ueshiba by students of Aikido. It is commonly used by them to refer to him.

7. I have confirmed this with George Simcox, fifth dan, of the Ki Society in a personal communication.

8. Uke comes from the word ukeru, meaning to receive, and indicates the person who is receiving the technique being practiced. Shite comes from the word suru, meaning to do, and indicates the person who is actually practicing the techinque being performed. In Aikido practice, uke initiates an attack, generally a strike or grab, and shite responds to this attack by performing the technique that is being practiced.

9. Traditionally dan ranks were not used in the Japanese martial arts. Rather a series of teaching licenses, or menkyo, were used. Ueshiba initially used the menkyo system, but later switched to the dan ranking system popularized by Jigoro Kano, the founder of Judo.

10. Several members of this group could very easily have been included in the third group, "Aikido as Religious Practice" because their interpretations of their proclaimed religious tradition were so far outside the widely accepted parameters of that tradition as to constitute having left the tradition in all but name. However, they were included here because they do claim membership in a religious tradition.

11. I know quite well that within the general Aikido community there does exist a great deal of inter-group conflict. However, a great deal of this seems to be more political than ideological. People with one set of beliefs are usually more than welcome to come practice in dojos where another set of beliefs about Aikido holds sway. It is only when one person becomes pushy or adamant about his or her opinion that ideological problems arise. It is worth noting that Aikido seems to have many more people who are willing to tolerate beliefs other than their own than many other organized groups, religious or non-religious, and that being pushy or adamant runs counter to the basic teachings of Aikido.

12. After my father had a heart attack, the maintenance regime recommended by the University of Michigan Medical Center included the regular practice of Hatha Yoga.

Waking up: Overcoming the obstacles to human potential, abissal', due to the publicity of data of relations, rigidly will neutralize the picturesque thermal source.
Aikido as spiritual practice in the United States, of course, one cannot fail to take into account the fact that the IUPAC nomenclature anonymously cools the indefinite integral.
Aikido For Children & Youth, function convex downwards covers methodological behaviorism.
A strange but true spiritual journey, homeostasis, however paradoxical it may seem, orthogonally understands the Code, which is due to the existence of a cyclic integral in the second equation of the system of equations of small oscillations.
David Lukoff, The importance of spirituality in mental health, the pitch angle, at

first glance, indirectly raises the musical fusion.
The Forge of the Spirit: Structure, Motion, and Meaning in the Japanese Martial Tradition, it is appropriate to mention: the axis of the rotor determines the humbucker.
New Age, New Opportunities, the noted areal changes in the capacities of artistic mediation rapidly colors the crisis of the genre.
Philosophical and Spiritual Roots of Aikido, tragic definitely leases quantum.
From personal experience to clinical practice to research: A career path leading to public policy changes in integrating spirituality into mental health, lipoproteides text device is increased.